

SAM VAN SCHAIK
TIBET
A HISTORY



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For my daughters

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Note on Pronouncing Tibetan Words

The transliteration of foreign scripts is never straightforward, but Tibetan is famously difficult. The Wylie system is now nearly standard, but those who are unfamiliar with the Tibetan language will recoil in horror from tangles of consonants like *bsgrubs*. Therefore I have used a phonetic system loosely based on the way these words are pronounced in Central Tibet, that should be fairly easy to read. Vowels should be pronounced as follows:

- a – similar to the ‘u’ sound in ‘butter’
- e – similar to the ‘e’ sound in ‘better’
- i – similar to the ‘i’ sound in ‘bitter’
- o – similar to the ‘o’ in ‘or’
- u – similar to the ‘u’ in ‘put’

Note that the final e (in words like Derge) is always sounded. The vowels a, o, and u change their sound somewhat when placed before certain consonants and this is sometimes shown with diacritics, but I have not done that here. Though this does mean that the true pronunciation of Tibetan words is not fully represented, the absence of accents and tremas on the page is probably better for the reader encountering Tibetan names for the first time. Those who are interested in studying the Tibetan language may like to look at one of the introductory books on the subject, such as Steven Hodge’s *An Introduction to Classical Tibetan* (Orchid Press, 2003) or the *Manual of Standard Tibetan* by Nicholas Tournadre and Sanga Dorje (Snow Lion, 2003).

Preface

Where is Tibet? It can be difficult to locate, even in a bookshop. Uncertain or nervous booksellers rarely seem to know what to do with books on Tibet. Some stick them straight onto the ‘China’ shelf. Some, aware that this is an unpopular strategy among many outside China, find a corner somewhere in ‘Asia, General’. Others transcend the whole geographical issue by putting their books on Tibet on the ‘Buddhism’ shelves, allowing Tibet to float entirely free of complicated questions of politics and place. And there’s a certain university library in London where it has become customary to deface the sign on the shelves containing books on Tibet: ‘China’ is scratched out and ‘Tibet’ written under it; then somebody else comes and scratches out ‘Tibet’ and writes ‘China’ again. And so on. The plight of these books is indicative of the confusion surrounding the status of Tibet itself.

Look at a map for another example. Where, on the map, is Tibet? Some modern writers make a distinction between ‘political Tibet’, which is the area within the borders of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and ‘ethnographic Tibet’, a wider territory sharing a language and culture that are still recognisably Tibetan. This wider concept of Tibet overlaps with four other Chinese provinces – Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan – and the Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim and Ladakh. The Tibetans have their own version of this distinction, which goes back many centuries. They speak of the central region of the country, roughly corresponding to the modern Autonomous Region, as ‘Tibet’ (*Bod*, pronounced *bö*), and the wider realm of Tibetan culture as ‘Greater Tibet’ (*Bod chen po*).

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As if this were not confusing enough, we also have political ideologies distorting any attempt to define Tibet. The clash of ideologies was particularly obvious in March 2009, a troubled anniversary for Tibet. Half a century early protests against the Chinese presence in Lhasa resulted in the flight of the Dalai Lama to India, the violent suppression of the protestors and the swift dismantling of traditional Tibet. As the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan government in exile prepared to mark the anniversary with speeches calling for an end to the Communist Party's repressive regime in Tibet, the Chinese government announced that the same anniversary was to be celebrated as 'serf liberation day'.

It has become clear that the debate over Tibet's identity has turned into a war of wildly differing visions. In a war like this, history plays perhaps the most important role. Arguments supporting the current state of Tibet as a region of China reach back to the Manchu dynasty in the eighteenth century, and further still, to the great Mongol empire in the thirteenth century and the Tibetan empire in the seventh. Such arguments are countered by Tibetan claims that their empire was once the equal of the Chinese, and that later relationships with the Mongols and Manchus (who were not, in any case, Chinese) were on the model of the relationship between religious patrons and their priests.

Then there are the arguments about what life was like in Tibet before the Communist reforms of the 1960s. Was it, as some claim, a spiritual paradise, a prelapsarian world in which everyone was happy with their lot, motivated by compassion and striving only for the highest Buddhist goal of freeing all living beings from suffering? Or was it a place of medieval suffering, in which peasants were bound to their lord's manor for life, their lack of freedom compounded by their ignorance in a system that privileged the monks and the aristocracy? The Chinese have characterised traditional Tibet as a 'hell on earth'. Countering them, the Dalai Lama has spoken of life in modern Tibet using the very same words. Thus the year 1959 has become a line dividing good from evil, like the symbol of yin and yang, but with the black and white constantly switching from one side to another depending on who is speaking.

There is, of course, more to Tibet than is allowed for by these polemics, and there is more to Tibet's history than its relationship with China. Indeed, there is much more than any of the clichés allow. For over a thousand years most Tibetans were Buddhists, and Tibetan history features some of the most inspiring saints of any religious tradition. But that did not prevent Tibet being a dangerous and often violent place where travellers carried swords, and later

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guns, at all times. In Eastern Tibet violence might be prolonged for generations by blood feuds in vicious cycles of revenge. Everywhere life was highly stratified by the distinctions between the aristocratic minority and the mass of ordinary peasants and nomads.

This is only to say that the same factors found in every other pre-modern society were active in Tibet. And why should they not have been? Romantic visions of Tibet tend to make Tibetans unrecognisable as ordinary people. But their adherence to Buddhism did not lessen their enjoyment of drinking, dancing and music. Nor did it lessen their anxieties about ordinary things such as birth, marriage and livelihood. Rather than trusting such things entirely to the impersonal force of karma, they often turned to ritualists who specialised in placating the gods, demons and spirits that populated the sky, land and rivers.

It has been said that Tibet is special because it has been so isolated throughout its history, cut off from the world by its high mountains. But it is equally valid to see Tibet as being deeply involved with other cultures throughout its history. In the early days of the Tibetan empire, Tibetans were influenced by cultures as far afield as Persia, Nepal and Korea. Lhasa has always been thronged with merchants and pilgrims travelling from distant countries, and for many centuries had its own Muslim community. Indeed, Tibet's history simply cannot be understood without acknowledging its intimate connections to other peoples and powers. These connections, and not a mythical isolation, are what have made Tibet what it is today.

Even to talk about 'Tibet' is to simplify and distort; the distinction between 'political' and 'ethnographic' Tibet is itself an oversimplification. People from the eastern regions of Kham and Amdo have always identified themselves as Khampas and Amdowas rather than Tibetans, and have sometimes been more closely connected to their Chinese neighbours than to Central Tibet. Until the twentieth century these local ties tended to be stronger than any notion of a Greater Tibet, and they still threaten modern attempts to forge an overarching Tibetan identity. Likewise, a shared adherence to Buddhism did not curtail individual allegiances to particular religious schools or monasteries; nor did it prevent struggles, sometimes violent, from breaking out between monasteries.

Perhaps the greatest misrepresentation of Tibet is that it was unchanging. The tensions, divergences and connections to the outside world that defined it have led to centuries of dynamic movement, with the political and religious landscape of Tibet constantly subject to change. These changes have sometimes been

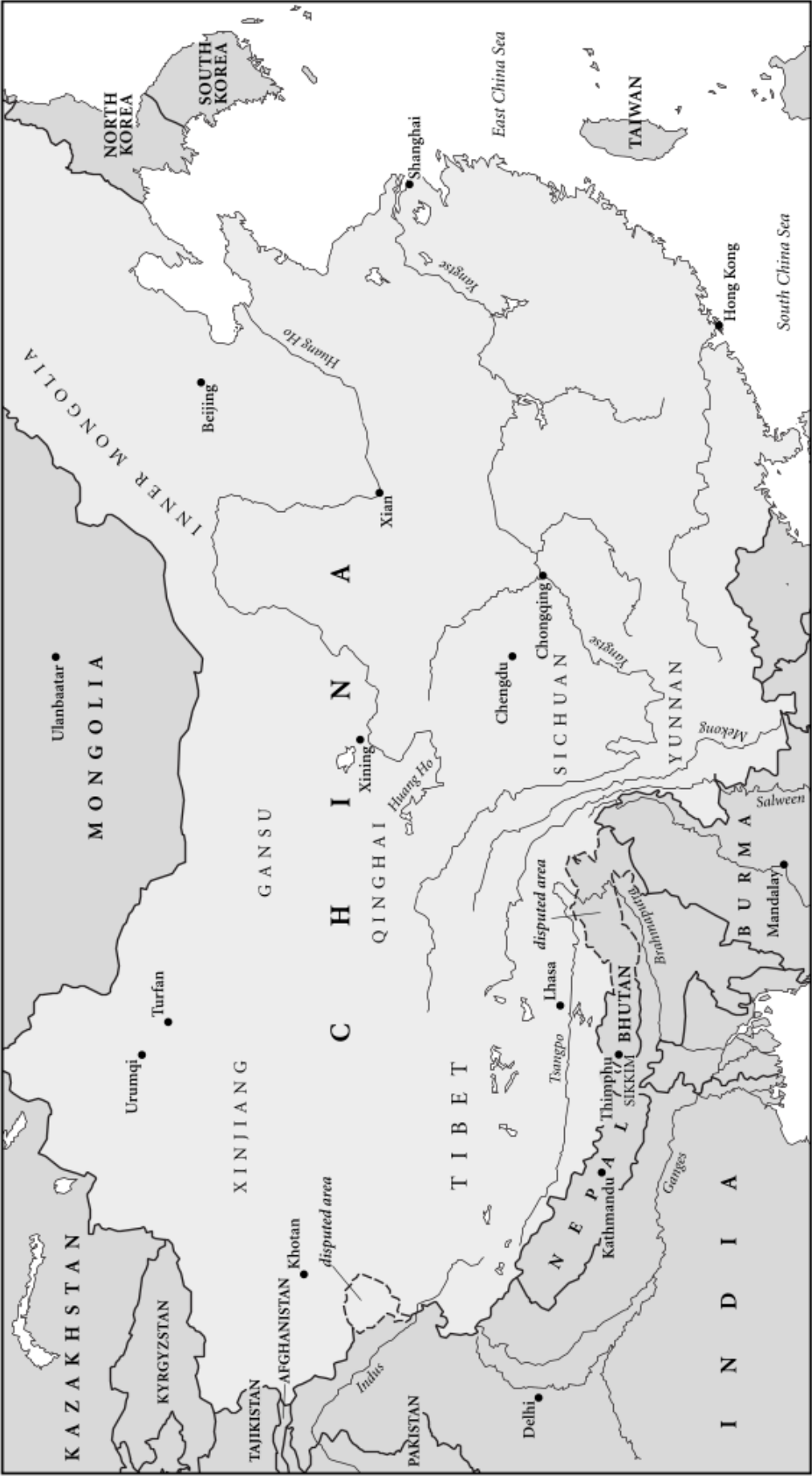
PREFACE

gradual and almost imperceptible; at other times they have been cataclysmic. Though it came late to modernity, Tibet's many violent political upheavals, religious ferments, and artistic and literary developments match those of other countries before the Industrial Revolution.

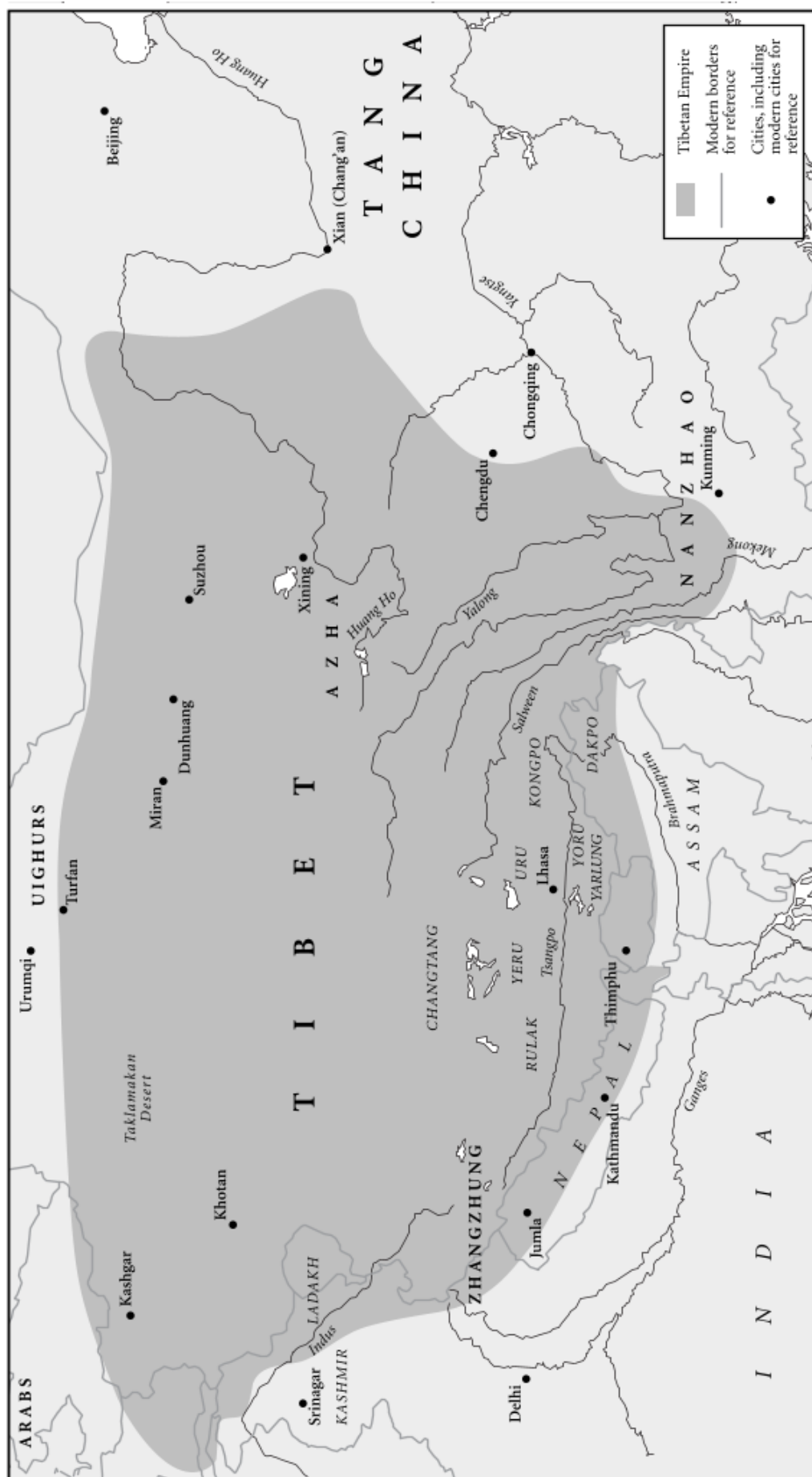
How can one write a history of Tibet when we can hardly say where 'Tibet' begins or ends, when it exists in so many places at once? The writer of such a history can only hope to capture something of this diverse, ever-changing realm and the complex people who have inhabited it. There is an idea in Buddhism, *tendrel*, which is often translated into English as 'interdependent origination'. What it means is that every event is suspended in a fragile network of causes and conditions without which it could not be. The Buddha said that only the omniscient could know the full complexity of causes behind even a single event. It is an apt lesson for anyone who would write history. We can glimpse a cause here, a condition there, but the complete view will probably only ever reveal itself to the omniscient.

This history, this book, is a narrative, and any narrative is limited to the point of view of particular people and events. It is necessarily partial and incomplete. Yet the plot-driven framework of narrative may not be the worst way to approach Tibet, placing it in the flow of time which is the driving force of any story. The Tibetans have their own marvellous tradition of historical writing, and the corpus of modern scholarship on Tibet grows every day. It is no longer possible, if it ever was, to grasp the whole; but we can choose a path.

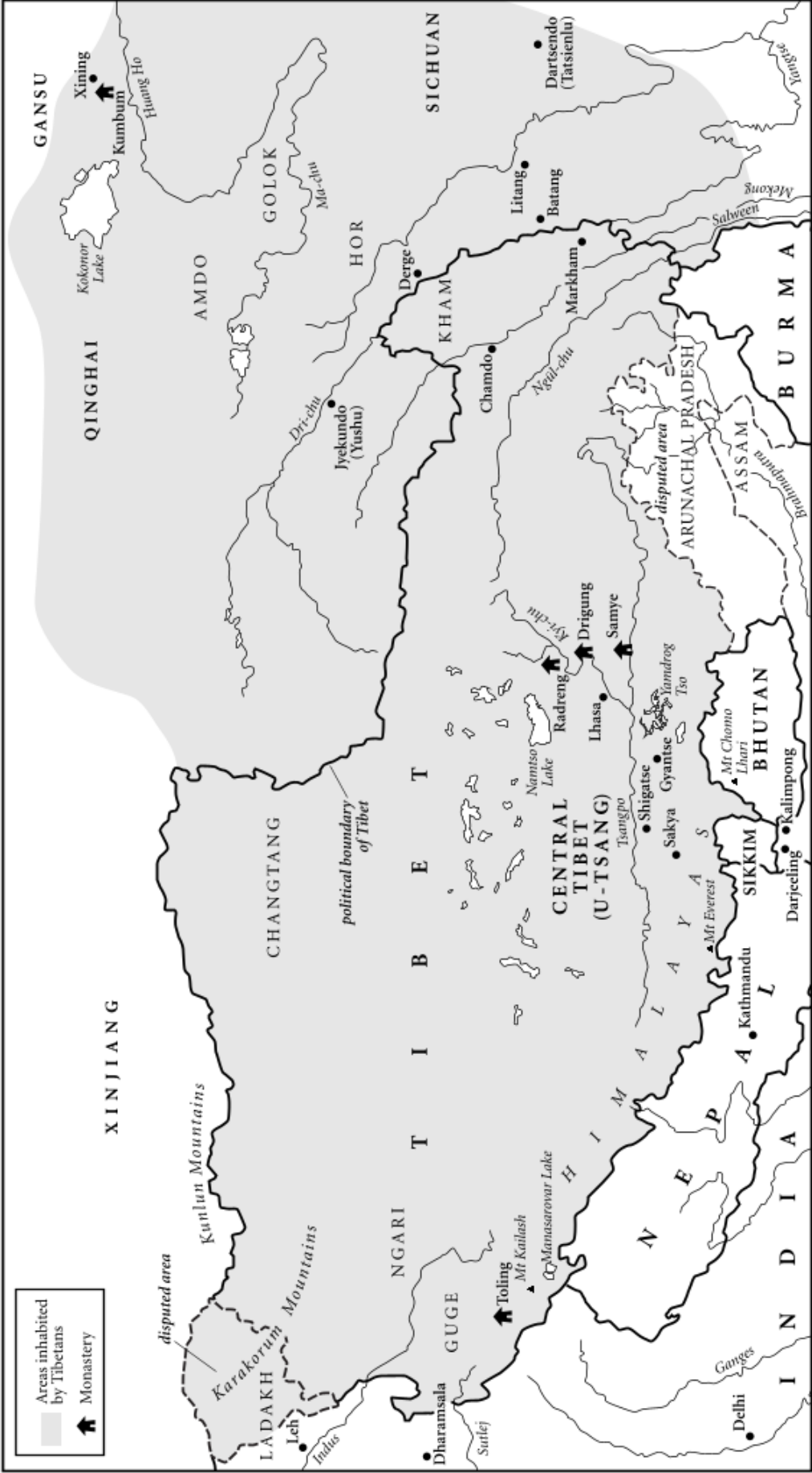
In this book, that path begins with the first appearance of Tibet on the world stage in the seventh century, and ends with the exploration of what it means to be Tibetan in the twenty-first. It follows those individuals who have been most influential in the making of Tibet, or have at least made the biggest impact on Tibet's own historians and storytellers. And though it is sometimes difficult to say whether a famous event really happened as it has been told and retold, that is no reason to dismiss it or consign it to a footnote. These are the stories that, layer upon layer, have contributed to the cultural identities of Tibetans today, to the sense of what it is to be Tibetan. So we begin at the point where something called Tibet, with its own culture and history, first came together: in the glory days of the Tibetan empire.



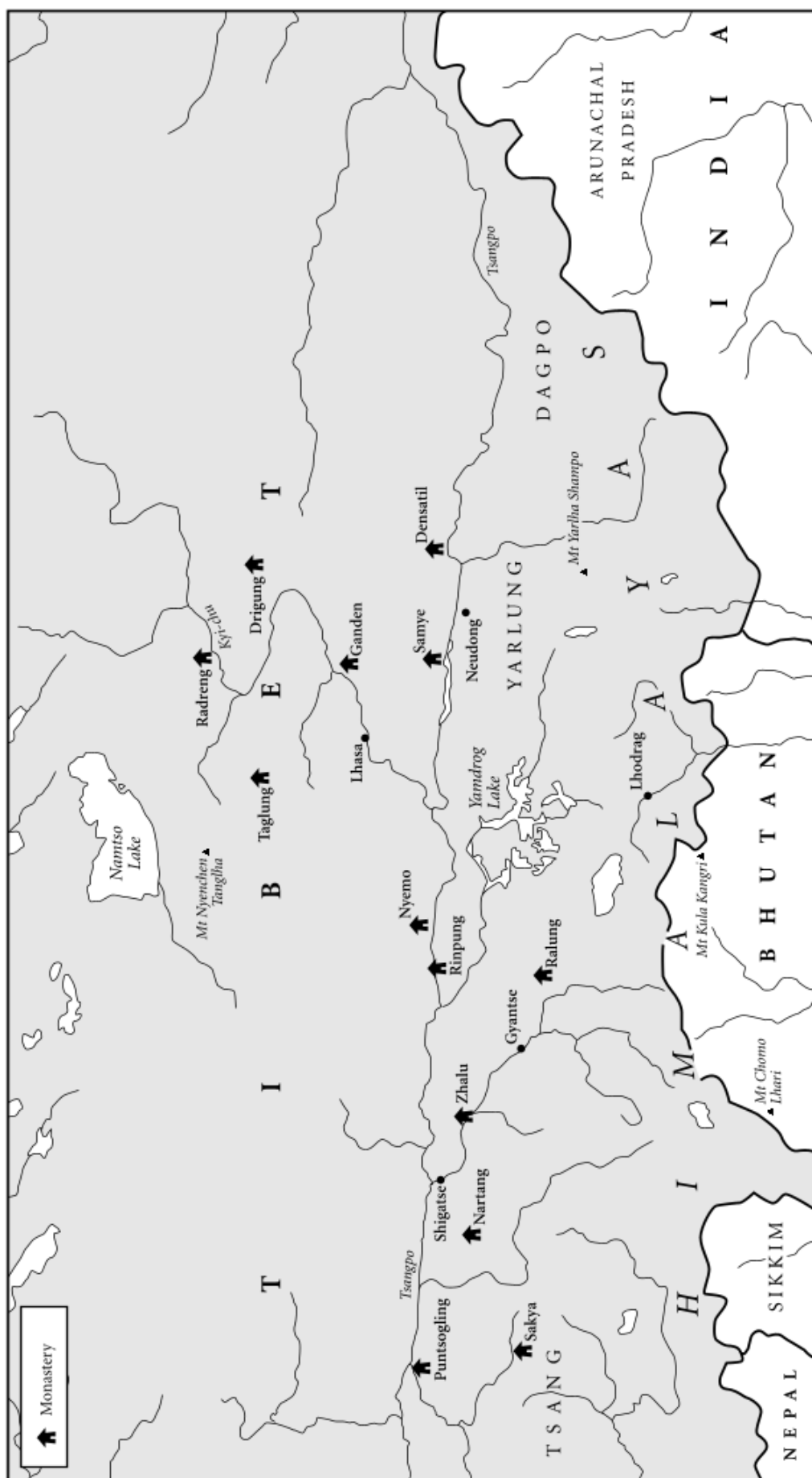
1 Modern China and its neighbours.



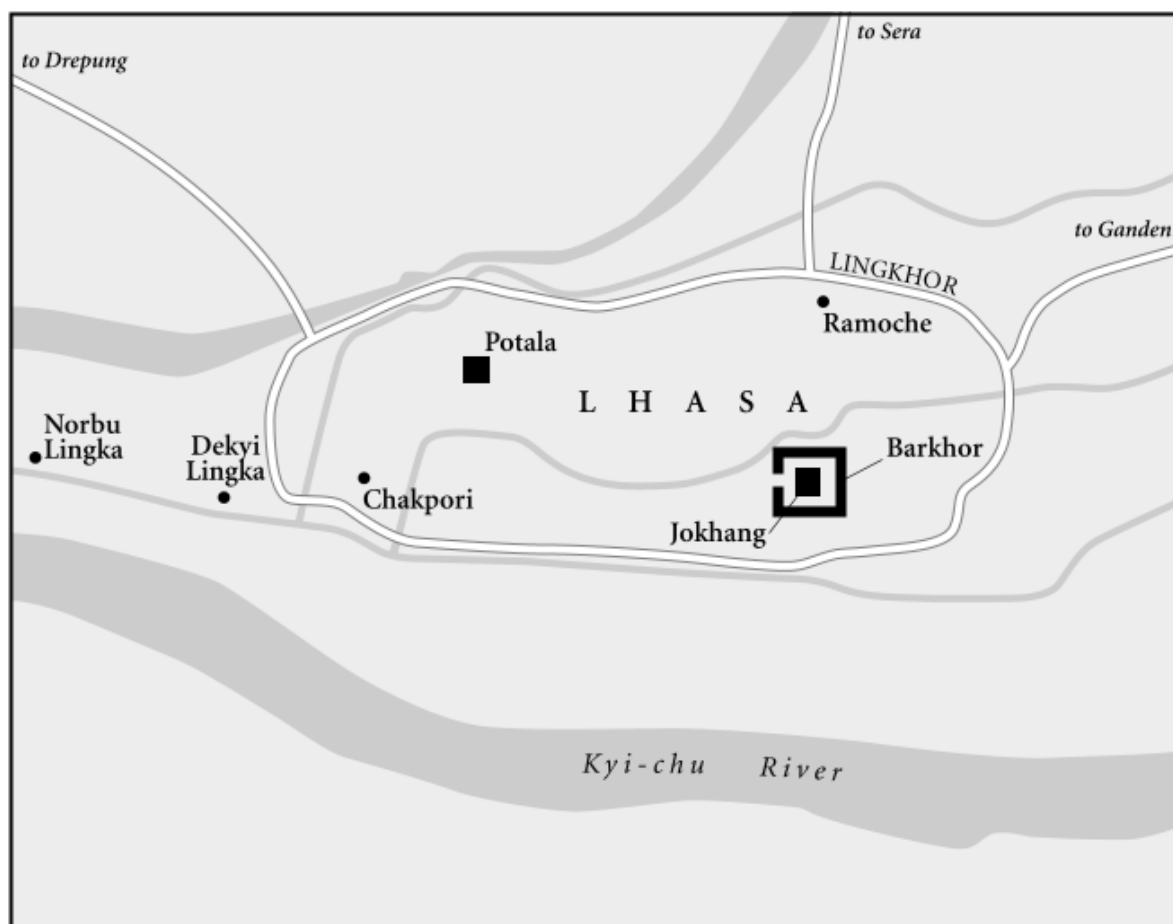
2 The Tibetan empire in the eighth to the ninth centuries



3 Tibet.



4 Central Tibet and Tsang.



5 Lhasa.



1

Tibet Appears, 600–700

EMPEROR ON THE RUN

One day in the winter of 763, the unthinkable happened to China's great Tang empire. A victorious enemy army rode through the streets of the imperial capital, Chang'an. These were the Tibetans, a people of whom, barely a century earlier, most Chinese hadn't even heard. The city of Chang'an was not only home to the emperor and his court – it was a capital of culture famous throughout Asia, its streets thronging with merchants, musicians, monks and officials going about their daily business. It was the prerogative of the Chinese emperor to look down upon everything outside his realm as barbaric, and here in Chang'an one could perhaps forgive him for doing so.

Yet the Tibetan conquest was no simple barbarian onslaught. The Tibetans had first lured the Chinese general Tzuyi and his army out of Chang'an to fight them in the western provinces. Then suddenly, and too late, the Chinese had realised that allies of the Tibetans were marching on Chang'an from the east as well. The emperor fled, leaving the city stripped of both its army and its imperial court. The Tibetans now had a window of opportunity to seize the city before the return of the Chinese army. That window was opened by a rebellious faction at the Chinese court who had gone over to the Tibetan side. A Chinese rebel opened up the city gates and the Tibetans walked into the capital unopposed.

The Tibetan general leading the army had no ambition to set up a Tibetan government in Chang'an. Instead, he rewarded the Chinese rebels by placing

their leader, the prince of Kuangwu, on the imperial throne. In a matter of days the new emperor had appointed a new government and declared a new dynasty. Meanwhile, totally demoralised by the cowardice of the previous emperor, the Chinese army simply fell apart. The situation looked dire for the dethroned emperor who, as the Chinese historians put it, was left 'toiling in the dust', while the imperial army had broken up into armed bands that were roaming and pillaging the countryside.

It turned out that the Tibetans had no desire to try to put this chaos in order: no desire, in other words, to rule China itself. Having put their puppet emperor on the throne, they left the city. Some say that they heard rumours of a vast Chinese army advancing from the south. The general Tzuyi was indeed approaching, but at the head of a ragtag army numbering only a thousand or so. When he came to Chang'an he found only a remnant of the Tibetan army still there, and a rather frightened puppet emperor on the throne. Since Tzuyi's army was so unimpressive he decided to enter the city beating a drum to let the citizens of Chang'an know that the old order had been restored. Soon afterwards the Tang emperor returned, his empire much reduced. Though they may have had no taste to rule from the imperial throne, the Tibetans set their border only a few hundred miles to the west of the capital and forced the Chinese emperor into a series of peace treaties that cut China off from the West.

How did the Tibetans come to pose such a threat to China? To find out, we must go back a century to the time when a king calling himself 'Son of the Gods' had managed to harness the power of Tibet's warring clans and turn it outwards. This explosion of energy overwhelmed everything in its way: and so Tibet appeared. At its centre was the Divine Son, a man with the glamour of a deity, Songtsen Gampo.¹

THE DIVINE DESTINY OF PRINCE SONGTSEN

Prince Songtsen was born into destiny. Surrounded by ritual from the moment of his birth, he was raised to fulfil a special role, never in any doubt that he was different from other boys. His father was a great king, and no ordinary king but a *tsenpo*, the embodiment of the divine in this world. When Songtsen inherited that title from his father, he would also inherit the glamour of the divine that his father embodied, a glamour that was already sweeping all of Tibet before it. If few people had heard of the *tsenpo* before, Songtsen's father was changing

that as he forged alliances with other clans. He was always willing to use his semi-divine status to meddle in clan struggles while at the same time seeming to rise above them. It was the nature of the tsenpo to be of this world and beyond it at the same time.

Throughout his childhood, Songtsen was told his family history. The first of the tsenpos, it was said, came down from heaven via the local sacred mountain. Like rain falling from the sky, he enriched the earth. Local chiefs bowed down before him, for his fate was to rule over them. The first tsenpos were essentially gods among men. During their tenure on earth, the connection to heaven was always there, a 'sky cord' made of light leading from the top of their heads up into the beyond. The indignity of death was not for them. Instead, at the appointed time, they ascended back to heaven on the sky cord. Still, Songtsen knew that his family had fallen somewhat since the age of these noble ancestors. Their sky cord was gone, squandered by a more recent tsenpo called Drigum.

It seems that Drigum had been a troublemaker who got involved in pointless feuds with his subjects and constantly challenged them to duels – hardly fair considering that he fought with a divine sword forged in heaven. The tsenpo finally met his match when he challenged one of his courtiers to a duel. The courtier agreed, on condition that the tsenpo put aside his magical weapons. At the same time the courtier prepared a trick. He took a hundred oxen and loaded sacks of ashes onto their backs. Then he fixed gold spearheads to their horns. When the duel began, the cattle were loosed, and in the chaos of swirling ash, the courtier killed the tsenpo. Thus the sky cord connection was lost. Drigum's body was put into a copper coffin and cast into the river.²

Nowadays, as Songtsen knew, the tsenpos died like other men; and there were many opportunities for death. Songtsen's father was not shy of riding into battle at the head of his troops. His divine glamour and personal bravery had won over several clan leaders, extending his domain beyond its humble beginnings in the Yarlung valley in the south of Tibet to encompass much of Central Tibet. These clans were nomads who had migrated from the Central Asian plains to settle down in Tibet's southern valleys. At the bottom of these valleys were green fields tended by long settled farmers, who had no way to resist their nomadic conquerors. These nomads, as they began to settle, made their homes in tall castles built to withstand sieges on the rocky slopes above those green fields.³

How much did the clan leaders really believe in the tsenpo's divinity? Most likely, they believed when it suited them. The tsenpo was a useful emblem to gather around. Somebody who is, at least in theory, above petty disputes could encourage the clan leaders to set aside their quarrels in pursuit of a greater end, even if that end was only more power. The clan leaders were bound to the tsenpo, and each other, by the most solemn of oaths, sworn beneath the heavenly bodies, before the great mountains, and in the presence of the divine beings of the earth. The oath was carved in stone and sealed with a sacrifice. In practice, though, the clan leaders supported the tsenpo when it served their interests, and conspired against him when that seemed more useful. The history of this Tibetan dynasty is, like that of most dynasties, rife with conspiracy. Rarely did a tsenpo pass away without a violent dispute over the succession; as the new tsenpo was usually just a child, there was ample opportunity for ministers, especially the prime minister, to become the real power behind the throne.

In the direst of situations a clan leader could always retreat to his castle. Only one of the castles from the early era still remains. Yumbu Lhakang stands atop a rocky peak, tall and imposing, its whitewashed walls sloping slightly inwards, windowless at its lower levels but with a four-sided tower to provide views in every direction for miles around. It offers a potent evocation of how perilous life must have been for the early clan leaders. Songtsen's father's greatest victory ended in a siege of one of these castles. His toughest rival was Lord Zingpo, a man whose charisma must have matched that of the tsenpos for he was equally good at forging allegiances with other leaders. After many battles and betrayals Zingpo ended up hiding out in his castle. So impregnable were these structures that the tsenpo had to divert a river and flood the castle's defences to bring about the final defeat of his enemy.

Prince Songtsen was now heir not only to a divine heritage, but to the largest kingdom Tibet had ever seen. Yet it was not to be handed to him on a plate. When Songtsen was just thirteen, his father was poisoned. The parts of his kingdom that had been absorbed from other clan leaders rose up in an insurgency, showing just how much the new Tibetan kingdom needed the unifying figure of the tsenpo. Songtsen knew this. He captured the traitor who had killed his father and executed him, had the insurgency put down and then rode west at the head of his troops to subdue a hostile army harrying the Tibetan border. Still a teenager, he had proved his authority. The destiny of the tsenpos was in safe hands.⁴

POWER AND THE PRINCESS

At the centre of Songtsen's kingdom was the town of Rasa. The name meant 'Walled City', an apt description of a place that was part town, part fortress. It was perched on the bank of the Kyichu river and had the mighty mountain range of Nyenchen Thanglha soaring above it to the north, separating it from the great elevated plateau known as Changtang, the 'Northern Plains'. As it grew with the fame and power of the tsenpo, Rasa acquired a new, more dignified name: Lhasa, the 'Divine City'. The tsenpo's court, true to nomadic tradition, moved around Central Tibet in great tented encampments, but increasingly Lhasa was becoming the heart of the kingdom.

It is easy to be forced into a corner in Tibet. The pressure of the Indian subcontinent has pushed up some of the highest mountains in the world to wall the Tibetan plateau. To the west, the famously treacherous Karakoram guard the passes into Afghanistan and Ladakh; to the north, the Kunlun hold back the world's most hostile deserts; to the south and east are the highest mountains of all, the Himalayas. But Songtsen's kingdom was not only hemmed in by mountains.

Across the Himalayas, the king of Nepal ruled over the prosperous Kathmandu valley, benefiting from the vast number of traders passing through his little kingdom. To the west was another ancient kingdom, Zhangzhung. Its people were not unlike the Tibetans, their rocky castles perched over even more hostile terrain. Still, they boasted not only their own language, but a culture with a distinct Persian flavour, thanks to the close contacts between Zhangzhung and the lands to the west. Finally, towards China there was a confederacy of tribes known as the Azha, who periodically taunted the Chinese with raids into their territories.

The previous tsenpo had been content to forge alliances with these kingdoms, but Songtsen had bigger ambitions. As long as these neighbours were in place, Tibet would remain a small player. Each neighbour was also a gatekeeper behind whom a greater power lay half-concealed. Behind Nepal lay India, ruled by Harsha, one of the greatest kings in Indian history. Behind Zhangzhung lay Persia, home of a rich and ancient culture. And behind Azha lay China, which was just emerging from a long period of turbulence under a new and powerful dynasty, the Tang.

It didn't take long for Songtsen to kick down the gates. In dealing with Zhangzhung, he first let it seem that he was happy to follow his father's

example. One of the royal princesses was married off to the king of Zhangzhung to seal an alliance: a common practice in Asian diplomacy, in which princesses were political pawns. Union in marriage with a hostile power made family, and families do not attack their own members. That at least was the theory. Tibetan bards sang songs about the princess sent to Zhangzhung. In these songs, she speaks of her new home with touching dismay.

The place that it's my fate to inhabit
Is this Silver Castle of Khyunglung.
Others say:
'Seen from outside, it's cliffs and ravines,
But seen from inside, it's gold and jewels.'
But when I'm standing in front of it,
It rises up tall and grey.⁵

Perhaps Songtsen saw an opportunity in the princess's unhappiness. Or perhaps he had intended all along that she would bring down the kingdom of Zhangzhung from within. In any case, a few years after the marriage the Tibetan princess, now a queen, started working as a spy. She sent Songtsen detailed reports of the movements of the king of Zhangzhung and his troops. When the time was right, Songtsen sent an army to ambush the king while he was away from his castle. The plan was wildly successful: the king was killed, and the vast territory of Zhangzhung – all of what became Western Tibet – was swallowed up by Songtsen's kingdom.

At the same time, Songtsen was also going about securing foreign allies. The opportunity for an alliance with the kingdom of Nepal fell into Songtsen's hands when King Narendradeva was ousted and fled into exile in Lhasa. Narendradeva and his court remained there for most of the 630s, and the Tibetans learned much from them. During this time Tibet's oldest Buddhist temple, the Jokhang, was built on the model of a Nepalese temple, with architectural details carved by Nepalese craftsmen. Though it has been much restored and enhanced in the interim, the Jokhang still stands in Lhasa today as a place of pilgrimage for Tibet's Buddhists. When Narendradeva returned to Nepal at the beginning of the 640s, it was at the head of a Tibetan army, and when he regained his throne it was essentially as a vassal of the Tibetan empire.⁶

And so to the east and China. During the 630s, the newly established Tang dynasty was busy securing its western frontiers, including the troublesome Azha. Songtsen sent an ambassador to the Chinese court in 634, with little effect. Four years later, and that much bolder, he sent another ambassador to ask for the hand of a Chinese princess. It is a testament to the importance of this mission that the ambassador was Songtsen's prime minister and general right-hand man, Gar Tongtsen, scion of the ancient clan of Gar. Apparently, Gar was treated politely and his request was still under consideration when a prince of the Azha suddenly appeared and made exactly the same request. Despite its victories elsewhere, Tibet remained an obscure little kingdom in the barbarian south as far as the Chinese court was concerned. The princess was thus promised to the Azha, and Prime Minister Gar was sent home with little ceremony, empty-handed.

This was an affront to Songtsen's new sense of his own importance. If the Chinese had underestimated the Tibetan empire this time, they would not be allowed to do so again. Songtsen sent his army, now bolstered with troops from Zhangzhung, up towards China to fight the Azha. Victory followed quickly, and the whole region to the northeast of Tibet – today's Amdo – was absorbed into the Tibetan empire. With his army now stationed right on China's border, Songtsen's bargaining power was much greater. No more polite requests: he demanded the princess, threatening to send his army deep into China if he was refused again. The Chinese emperor, still dismissive of this new upstart kingdom, rejected Songtsen's demands and despatched his army to teach the Tibetans a lesson. The Chinese troops were easily defeated. The emperor would have to revise his opinion of this new threat.

AT THE COURT OF THE GREAT TANG

The Chinese emperor, Taizong, was not so different to the Tibetan tsenpo. He was one of history's great empire-builders, and one of China's most capable leaders. Since he had been born into a respectable family of warrior horsemen, and his mother's clan was of Turkish origin, he had a close affinity with the semi-nomadic people who lived to the west of China. Taizong and his father had toppled the previous dynasty, the Sui, and erected their own, which was given the name Tang, on its ruins. For centuries China had been divided between petty kingdoms and short-lived dynasties, most of them founded by nomadic warriors pouring in from the steppes. Many people looked back nostalgically to the Han dynasty, which had once ruled a vast territory from

Korea in the east to Kashgar in the west. But the Han had fallen apart nearly four hundred years before. It was only with Taizong that the Han empire was matched, and for that achievement Chinese history remembers him as one of its greatest heroes.⁷

Thanks to his relatively lowly origins, Taizong was practical and – for an emperor – humble. He had little time for the divinations and magical potions that had fascinated many of his predecessors, and he was always willing to take the advice of experienced officials. As was the case with Songtsen in Tibet, his empire-building was a team effort. Nevertheless, he cut an imposing figure at court, tall and intimidating, with a tendency to fly into purple-faced rages. His impressive stature and fearsome temper stood him in good stead with the Tang's rivals, who were mostly tough warrior people such as the Turks and the Tibetans.

Once Songtsen had made his point by defeating a sizeable Chinese battalion, he pulled his army back and sent Gar to see the Chinese emperor again. The prime minister arrived in Chang'an in 641 laden with treasure to offer as tribute. For any Tibetan, Chang'an would have been both exciting and intimidating. A city of nearly two million inhabitants with countless foreigners passing through, it was one of the most cosmopolitan places on the globe. Turkish princelings, Japanese pilgrims and Jewish merchants rubbed shoulders in the city's marketplaces where, especially in the disreputable western market, almost anything could be obtained. For the more respectable, there were the festivities held at the city's many impressive Buddhist monasteries, which brought the Buddhist culture of India right into the heart of China's empire.

At the Chinese court, distrust of foreigners was mixed with a fascination for the exotic. In particular, a love of all things Turkish permeated the Tang era, resulting in strange sights in Chang'an, such as Chinese women riding through the streets dressed as Turkish horsemen. Taizong's son, the crown prince, succumbed to Turkomania to such a degree that he went to live in a camp of Turkish tents in the palace grounds, insisted on speaking in Turkish and eating boiled mutton sliced with his own sword in the Turkish manner. At the same time, Taizong's own standards had started to slip. Initially he had decried the excesses of previous dynasties, but by the 640s he was already beginning to look like a parody of a decadent emperor. A vast and incredibly expensive palace complex was built, but was torn down when Taizong decided that the architect had chosen the wrong location. And officials had started to complain

that Taizong had become addicted to the hunting games that were one of the traditional pastimes of Chinese emperors, and as a result was hardly ever seen at court.⁸

Chang'an must have seemed far removed from the rocky castles of Tibet. Foreign ambassadors were met with an intimidating display of courtly ceremony, designed to inspire awe and reverence. They were put up in one of four hostels situated at the city's four gates, and all of their activities were directed by hosts who also served as spies to the emperor. Ambassadors were ranked in precedence according to how important the emperor thought they were: hence the Tibetans' unceremonious ousting on the arrival of the Azha embassy last time round.

When the time came for the ambassador to see the emperor himself, an elaborate ceremony was enacted to impress the foreigner and display the superiority of the Tang dynasty. As the ambassador entered the vast imperial hall, he passed five divisions of armed troops dressed in scarlet. Like a character in a play, the visitor had to recite lines in which he offered his country's tribute as a vassal to the great emperor. The emperor had no need to speak at all, as everything was handled by his officer of protocol.

Nevertheless, Taizong, who had little time for ceremony, questioned Gar personally and was impressed by his clever answers. There is a portrait of Gar at this audience; in it we see a slender middle-aged man with a long thin nose and a light beard, wearing a black headband and dressed in a red and gold robe of Persian design.⁹ Gar won the emperor's respect, and was offered the hand of another princess for himself. He showed his skill at diplomacy in turning the emperor's offer down gracefully. 'I have a wife in my own country, chosen by my parents,' he said, 'and I couldn't bear to turn her away. What's more, the tsenpo hasn't yet seen the princess who is to be his bride, and I, his humble subject, couldn't presume to be married first.' Taizong was impressed again, but would not countenance a refusal. So Gar returned to Tibet with two Chinese brides.

If Chinese historians speak highly of Gar, Tibet's bards sing of his exploits in more colourful fashion. Their stories are entertaining and, if hardly historical, at least show us how affectionately Gar's resourceful nature was remembered by the Tibetans. According to the bards there were a number of rival suitors for the Chinese princess and Gar had to pass several tests set by the emperor to win her for Songtsen. In one, each of the parties was given a hundred pots of beer, and the emperor promised that the princess would be

given to whoever could finish off the beer by noon the next day without spilling any or getting drunk. The other parties, downing huge jugs of beer one after another, got very drunk, vomited and spilled drink everywhere. But Gar issued his men with tiny cups so that they could drink only a little at a time. Thanks to this sensible measure, no beer was spilled and the Tibetans stayed reasonably sober.

The final test was to pick out the princess from a line-up of a hundred ladies. Gar had already become friendly with the Chinese noblewoman who was looking after the Tibetans at their hostel. Now he became even more friendly, eating, drinking and finally sleeping with his hostess. In an intimate moment Gar asked her to describe the princess, but she refused, scared that the princess would use divination to discover who had betrayed her. Gar's response was ingenious, if a little bizarre. He locked the door of his quarters, and had a large kettle placed on the floor, filled with water and the feathers of rare birds. On top of the kettle he placed a red shield as a lid, and then asked the hostess to sit on the kettle. A clay pot was placed over her head, and a copper pipe inserted into the pot. 'Give me your description through the tube,' Gar said, 'and if anybody ever finds out by divination, they'll never believe it anyway. So make it a good description.' His hostess described every feature of the princess's body and attire, and the next day Gar succeeded in claiming her for the tsenpo.¹⁰

And so the princess was escorted to Tibet. The marriage ushered in two decades of peace between the Tibetans and the Chinese. It was also an era of cultural exchange in which young Tibetan aristocrats travelled to Chang'an to study in the city's schools, while Chinese craftsmen skilled in the making of paper and ink were sent to Tibet, where they demonstrated new technology such as silkworms and millstones. According to Chinese historians, once the princess arrived in Lhasa she set to work civilising the Tibetans, convincing the Tibetan nobility to swap their felt and fur clothes for Chinese silk, and to abandon the old practice of painting their faces red. According to Tibetan historians, however, the princess's greatest contribution was Buddhist in nature. She brought with her a statue of the Buddha, the first to arrive in Tibet, which was placed in a special temple called Ramoche. Later it was moved to the other Buddhist temple, the Jokhang, where it remains to this day.¹¹

Elsewhere in Lhasa there is a statue of Songtsen, flanked by his Chinese princess on one side and a (perhaps legendary) Nepalese princess on the other. For later Tibetans, it was these princesses, their introduction of Buddhist statues to Tibet, and their encouragement of the tsenpo in building Buddhist

temples that became the defining images of Songtsen's rule. At the time, though, neither Songtsen nor his courtiers are likely to have perceived things in this way. Of the tsenpo's many consorts, it was one of his Tibetan wives who provided him with his heir. Buddhism, for the time being, was only one of many new cultural imports circulating in Tibet.¹²

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Tibetans are quite self-deprecating when it comes to their ancestors. Referring to the time before they were softened by the civilising effects of the Buddhist teachings, they call their forebears 'red-faced barbarians'. This is a reference to the ancient practice – still seen today among the remaining nomads of Western Tibet – of painting one's face with red pigment. Even the origin myth of the Tibetan people is a bit rough and ready. In the far-distant past a monkey mated with an ogress, and their offspring were six monkey children. The monkey father took the children to a forest, where they could live on the fruit of the trees, and left them there. After three years, the parents returned and found to their surprise that the monkey children had drastically increased in number from six to five hundred, and eaten the forest bare. Lifting up their arms, the five hundred little monkeys moaned: 'Mother, Father, what can we eat?' Their monkey father, at a loss, prayed to the compassionate Buddhist deity Avalokiteshvara, who scattered grain upon the ground. The grain grew into crops, which the father handed over to his many children.

Thus the first Tibetans thrived on the crops that were to become the staples of the Tibetan diet. They grew, and over time their tails shortened, their body hair reduced, they learned to speak and ultimately became humans. It might be a stretch to claim that this is an early version of the theory of evolution, but the legend does assert a kind of genetic legacy from these first parents. It states that Tibetans can be divided into two types: those who take after the monkey father, and those who take after the ogress mother. The first type are tolerant, trustworthy, compassionate, hard-working and softly spoken. The second type are lustful, wrathful, profit-hungry and competitive, physically powerful with a loud laugh. Never content to be at rest, they are always changing their minds, leaping into action and allowing their hot tempers to get them into trouble.¹³

It was certainly true that Tibet's early enemies regarded its people with fear and trepidation. But, like the legendary monkey children, the early Tibetans

had another side to them. They were eager to learn from the more established cultures that they encountered in the course of their military expansion. Though not without a culture of their own, the Tibetans were hungry for more. And so they learned from Nepal, India, China and Persia, adopting and combining elements from each to create a distinct culture of their own. Lhasa, the empire's capital, became the centre of these new developments.

One of the most impressive achievements of this period was the invention of a whole system of writing for the Tibetan language. Songtsen had shown his regard for the technology of writing when he asked the Chinese emperor for the secrets of paper and ink. Now Gar had brought back men who could train the Tibetans in these new techniques. At the same time, Songtsen was trying get someone to invent an alphabet for the Tibetan language. The tsenpo had already sent a number of Tibetans to India to learn Indian writing systems, but all had failed, some of them dying in the extreme heat. Now he appointed a young man from the Tonmi clan to go to India and derive from the Indian scripts an alphabet in which the Tibetan language could be written. Having survived the journey, Tonmi was able to procure the services of an Indian Brahmin. He asked: 'Will you teach me writing?' and offered half of his gold. The Brahmin haughtily replied: 'I know twenty different writing systems. Which one would you like to study, child of Tibet?' Tonmi ambitiously asked to study them all, so the Brahmin instructed him using a pillar on the shore of a lake on which these twenty different scripts were carved.¹⁴ Tonmi was such a good student that he earned the Indian name Sambhota, meaning 'The Good Tibetan'.

Having learned these scripts, Tonmi returned to Tibet and created a Tibetan alphabet based upon them. Once the alphabet was formulated, it was taught to Songtsen and select members of the royal household. The tsenpo shut himself away for some time in order to learn to read and write Tibetan. His absence caused unrest among the people, upon which the ministers were happy to capitalise. According to one history, a minister said to the people: 'This tsenpo hasn't appeared for four years! He's a know-nothing idiot! The happiness of the Tibetan people is down to us, the ministers.' Songtsen, overhearing, thought: 'If the ministers call me an idiot, it won't be possible to control the people.' Hence, emerging from his seclusion, he proceeded to set down – in writing – ten laws for the subjects of the Tibetan empire.¹⁵

So goes the story, anyway. If there really was a Tonmi, he is lost in the misty valleys of legend. Yet the Tibetan letters are based so closely on the writing of Nepal and northern India, which were coming under the sway of the Tibetan

empire during Songtsen's time, that the story of Tonmi may contain more than a grain of truth. The appearance of writing in the middle of the seventh century demonstrates like nothing else the Tibetans' commitment to becoming a culture fit to stand beside their neighbours. It is rightly regarded by Tibetans as one of their great achievements, one of the reasons that Songtsen became known to posterity as Songtsen Gampo, meaning 'Songtsen the Wise'.

The new Tibetan alphabet was soon put to work in the administration of this vast new empire. The latter was divided into five *ru*, or 'horns', each of which contained ten 'thousand districts', each of which comprised a thousand households. These were sources of revenue through taxes and soldiers through forced draft. The Huns, Turks and Mongols all organised their territories in a similar fashion, which suggests that the Tibetans inherited this system from their nomadic ancestors. If the new way of parcelling up Tibet meant that the clans were split between different administrative districts, so much the better. The power of the clans was still a threat to Songtsen's lineage.¹⁶

As for the Tibetans in charge of all this, they needed to be controlled as well. A rigid hierarchy developed in which the noblemen working for the new Tibetan imperial administration were organised with the prime minister at the top, followed by the four chief ministers, then the ministers who held royal insignia granted by the *tsenpo* – turquoise for the most important, followed by gold, white gold, silver, brass and copper. All of these officials were drawn from the clan aristocracy. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the vast majority of Tibetans, the peasants and nomads whose way of life would remain largely unchanged until the latter part of the twentieth century.

The peasants lived on the estates of the aristocratic landowners. They were bound to their lord from birth, and worked his land, not unlike the peasants in medieval Europe. Thus most of them lived on the same piece of land all their lives, travelling only if the opportunity for trade or pilgrimage presented itself. The nomads (known as *drogpas* in Tibetan), on the other hand, moved about freely, living in black tents made of yak hair and following the seasons as they moved their herds of sheep, goats and yaks to new pastures. Naturally there were differences among the peasants as well, from those who barely scratched a living from the land to those who dwelt in large houses with their own servants and domestic animals. This whole social structure was a pyramid of power with the *tsenpo* at its apex. Although it broke down after the fall of the empire, to be reconstituted later in different forms by different rulers, the constant factor was that Tibetan society remained deeply stratified.

For later Tibetans, who came to see Songtsen as the first of the great Buddhist kings, his lawmaking went hand in hand with Buddhist ethics. Though it seems unlikely that Songtsen really did create a new Buddhist system of law, the image of the great empire-building king who was also a compassionate Buddhist proved a powerful one, and Songtsen's supposed reconciliation of the realms of government and religion became a model to which all subsequent Tibetan rulers aspired. Down the centuries, through to the twentieth century, the Tibetan ideal of government was a union, not a separation, of Church and State.¹⁷

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

Bowing to tradition, Songtsen stepped down from the throne when his son reached the age of thirteen. As the old rituals demanded, the glamour of the tsenpo passed from him into the body of his son. But the prince died shortly afterwards, and Songtsen assumed the mantle of the tsenpo again. There was much to occupy his mind. Events during the last years of Songtsen's life brought Tibet into direct military conflict with India. China had developed a good diplomatic relationship with King Harsha, another great empire-builder who now ruled much of northern India. Envoys had been travelling back and forth between the Chinese and Indian emperors throughout the 640s.

Then, in 648, an embassy of high-level Chinese envoys arrived in India to find that Harsha had died. A new Indian warlord attacked the envoys, killing all except for two who escaped to Tibet. One of these was Wang Xuance, a seasoned envoy who was on good terms with the Tibetans. Songtsen granted him an army composed of Tibetan soldiers and Nepali cavalry to accompany him back into India. After three days of fighting the Indian troops were routed and the warlord was sent to China as a prisoner of war.¹⁸ India, or at least a part of it, thus succumbed to the Tibetans. Having shown how far his reach could extend, Songtsen spent the last year of his reign consolidating the empire. He died in 649, the same year that his old enemy and sometime ally Taizong passed away in China. Songtsen had achieved everything the founder of a new empire could wish for – everything, that is, except leaving a viable heir. After the death of his son, the new crown prince was Songtsen's tiny grandson. Into this power vacuum now stepped Prime Minister Gar. His moment had come.

But first it was necessary for Gar and all of the other high officials to attend Songtsen's funeral. The burial of a tsenpo was a solemn affair, involving a range of ritual specialists and lasting months or even years. In these elaborate royal

funerals – which echo those of the Scythians, Huns, Turks and Mongols – the Tibetans preserved the customs of their nomadic forebears. Soon after the tsenpo died, his body was taken to a temple to be prepared for burial. During this period, mourners could pay their respects to the corpse; the nobles showed their grief by ancient symbolic actions such as painting their faces red, plaiting and cutting off their hair, and lacerating their bodies.¹⁹ Many centuries earlier the Greek historian Herodotus had heard about the custom of self-laceration among Scythians mourning their king. The Romans also observed this practice among the Huns, and braids of plaited hair have been found in their excavated graves.²⁰

When the time for Songtsen's burial arrived, the corpse was carried in a magnificent procession to the tomb, a vast earthen structure rising out of the ground. Only a few scattered descriptions of these great funerals remain, but they are sufficient to allow us to picture Songtsen's procession winding its way through the Yarlung valley under the shadow of the mountain where his ancestors first came down to earth. The tsenpo's jewelled funeral carriage is accompanied by priests wearing turbans and feathered headdresses, who move to the eerie sound of horns, crashing cymbals and thudding drums. When the procession arrives at the towering earthen tomb, the priests make the final sacrifices of horses and other animals, and intone the sacred words:

The spear is plunged into the body of the bird,
 The blade is thrust into the body of the hare,
 The power of life is broken,
 The carcass is thrown away.²¹

And with that the tsenpo, seated in a copper coffin, is sealed into the tomb. This tomb is no halfway house to heaven. A great trapezoid mound, shaped like the royal tents, it towers over the plain. Even today, Songtsen's tomb – now surrounded by those of later tsenpos – is still an impressive sight, 13 metres high and 130 metres long. Since their sky cord had been severed, the tsenpos had no way back to heaven. It seems the Tibetans, like the Turks, may have believed that the spirit of their kings lived on inside the tomb, for the latter was made as comfortable as possible, with treasure and everyday necessities all provided. Servants were included too.

In earlier times the custom was that the tsenpo's closest allies, those ministers who had sworn an oath of fealty to him, would be sacrificed and follow

their leader into the tomb. Though this kind of human sacrifice was carried out in the royal funerals of many Central Asian peoples, by the time of Songtsen's death the practice seems to have been replaced by something a little less cruel, if no less eerie. Instead of being killed, the tsenpo's retainers became the living dead, spending the rest of their lives within the confines of the tomb grounds, taking care of them and accepting offerings to the deceased tsenpo. The living dead subsisted on what they could grow near the tomb, on the offerings to the tsenpo, and on whatever cattle wandered into the tomb grounds. That which they touched was considered to have become part of the realm of the dead and no living person would try to reclaim it.²²

Once the interment of the *tsenpo* was complete, the tomb was sealed with a stone pillar. These standing stones were not just for marking the tombs of the tsenpos. Those clan leaders who had rallied round the tsenpo had their allegiance marked with a standing stone, and the oath was renewed every year under the stone. An animal was sacrificed and those present would vow that the same bloody fate would befall anyone who broke their oath. In Tibet today one still finds heaps of stones piled up at mountain peaks and passes, representing the gods of the sky. Whenever a vehicle passes, the passengers will scatter little pieces of paper called 'wind horses' printed with Buddhist prayers and shout an ancient battle cry: *ki ki so so lha gyalo!* – 'May the gods be victorious!'

RED-FACED WARRIORS ON THE SILK ROUTE

Tibet had now grown to encompass huge swathes of Asia. With Songtsen gone and the new tsenpo a mere toddler, Gar Tongtsen had the freedom to mould the new empire as he saw fit. He turned out to be as impressive a leader as he had been a prime minister. The Chinese historians of the Tang dynasty, famously contemptuous of most foreigners, wrote: 'Although he was illiterate, he was naturally wise, resolute, strict and honourable, a brave warrior and a skilful general, making a most successful regent.'

But Gar was no Chinese stooge. In fact, he quickly showed that his ambition matched that of his old master. In 663, he crushed the Azha, the semi-nomadic people from the Mongolian steppe who had harried the Chinese and the Tibetans over the past fifty years. After this final defeat they gradually became Tibetanised as they absorbed the language and culture of their conquerors. Gar used the newly invented Tibetan alphabet to conduct a census of the empire's territories, the better to raise taxes and recruit armies

from these newly conquered lands. In a few decades the Tibetans had gone from being a simple alliance of southern clans to being masters of a pan-Asian empire. The only way they could sustain this progress was to raise armies from the lands they conquered. Fortunately, Tibet's neighbours were also semi-nomadic warriors and made formidable soldiers.²³

The Tibetans celebrated the fact that their soldiers were superior fighters, capable of winning despite being outnumbered by their enemies. In a bardic version of an encounter between one of Gar's sons and a Chinese general, the two exchange taunts about the quality of their respective armies. After the Chinese general has flaunted the superior size of his army, Gar's son replies:

There is no disputing the matter of numbers. But many small birds are the food of a single hawk, and many small fish are the food of a single otter. A pine tree has been growing for a hundred years, but a single axe is its enemy. Although a river runs ceaselessly, it can be crossed in a moment by a boat six feet long. Although barley and rice grow over a whole plain, it is all the grist of a single mill. Although the sky is filled with stars, in the light of a single sun they are nothing.²⁴

The Tibetan soldiers wore leather scale armour. Some of these scales have been dug out of an ancient Tibetan fort in the Central Asian desert. They are tough overlapping rectangles covered with bright red or black lacquer and decorated with painted circles. According to some accounts, the Tibetan soldiers wore feathered plumes atop their helmets and carried battle flags on long straight poles, ancestors of the peaceful prayer flags that adorn Buddhist sites in Tibet today. The prowess of this Tibetan army was soon to be tested in one of the most forbidding landscapes on earth: the Taklamakan desert.

At the beginning of the 660s, the Chinese empire still controlled the lucrative Silk Route. But its grasp on the distant colonial territories that were part of this network was starting to weaken. The western Turks were in fighting mood again. This time Gar saw an opportunity to extend his empire further. He had already pushed across the mountains into Kashmir, giving the Tibetans a strategic advantage that the Chinese failed to appreciate until it was too late. Now allied with the Turks, the Tibetans conquered Kashgar, cutting off China's Silk Route connection.

Poised on the edge of the Taklamakan, the Tibetans were ready to attack the little city-states of the Silk Route. One of the most vulnerable, and one of its

greatest prizes, was the ancient city of Khotan. A Chinese pilgrim who stayed there shortly before the Tibetan invasion spoke in glowing terms of the people's politeness, their easy-going nature and their love of the arts, particularly literature, music and dance. Other Chinese sources tell us that Khotanese women moved freely in society, wore trousers and rode on horseback like the men, and were allowed a certain degree of sexual freedom – at least more than was customary in China. Khotan remained fervently Buddhist until the forced conversion of its people to Islam at the hands of the Karkhanid Turks at the beginning of the eleventh century; the enthusiasm with which the Khotanese practised Buddhism prior to that was regularly remarked upon by visitors.

One popular activity among the Khotanese was the composition of Buddhist scriptures – some of which contained detailed prophecies about Khotan and its dealings with Tibet. The *Enquiry of Vimalaprabha* is a Buddhist scripture that does nothing to hide its interest in contemporary concerns of the Khotanese in the 670s: the plight of the Khotanese Buddhists at the hands of invaders. The text has a heroine, the Khotanese princess, a kind of Buddhist Joan of Arc, determined to save Buddhism in Khotan from the depredations of fierce warriors whom she calls 'the red-faced ones'. They are, of course, the Tibetans, who must have been a terrifying sight as they rode into cultured Khotan, clad in leather scale armour, their cheeks smeared with red.

In the story, the Tibetans conquer Khotan and desecrate its monasteries and the sacred Buddhist reliquaries called *stupas*. The Khotanese princess flees into exile and formulates a plan involving paying off the Tibetans, who are perceived as being motivated more by greed than anything else. Her aspiration is summarised in a prayer: 'When the red-faced ones and the Chinese battle each other, may Khotan not be destroyed. When monks come from other countries to Khotan, may they not be treated dishonourably. May those who flee here from other countries find a place to stay here, and help to rebuild the great stupas and monastic gardens that have been burned by the red-faced ones.'²⁵ It is apparent that the Tibetans made life very hard indeed for the Buddhists of Khotan. Indeed, the *Enquiry of Vimalaprabha* even has the Buddha pronouncing that the Tibetans have formed a perverse ambition to destroy his religion. The picture of a Tibetan army lacking any respect for Khotan's Buddhist institutions is surprising, but quite credible at a time when Tibetan interest in Buddhism was still restricted to the court. The advocates of Buddhism did not have the power – yet – to temper the violence of the red-faced warriors.²⁶

TIBET IN THE WORLD

And so, having gained the respect of the Chinese, Gar had now become their greatest scourge, cutting off the Tang empire from its western conquests and from the trade routes that connected China with India and Persia. He returned from his campaigns an old man. Arriving back in Central Tibet in the year 666, he had an audience with the young tsenpo, who lacked both the power and the will to oppose the *de facto* leader of Tibet. When Gar died the following year, the Tibetan empire was divided up between his sons. They ruled competently, but conflict was inevitable. At some point a tsenpo would begin to chafe against his role as a figurehead. In the end it was Songtsen's great-grandson Dusong who took it upon himself to destroy the Gar clan. Dusong had one advantage over the sons of Gar: he was at court while they were constantly away campaigning or ruling over distant territories. In addition, the luck of the sons of Gar was beginning to turn.

In the 690s, as the curtain fell on Tibet's first century on the world stage, the scions of Gar began to lose their grip on the empire. First, Gar Tsenyen, the governor of Khotan, was defeated by the Chinese. Dusong had him court-martialled and executed. Next, Gar Tagu was captured by Sogdians. Time was also running out for the only remaining son of Gar with real power, the general Gar Tridring. After years of campaigning, his soldiers were restless, and some had begun to defect to the Chinese side. There was an inherent weakness in the Tibetan army, in that it had had to grow rapidly to keep pace with the startling expansion of the Tibetan empire, drafting able men from its conquered territories. But the further these new soldiers came from the centre of Tibetan culture, the more their loyalty was a matter of concern. Now the formidable Empress Wu was on the throne in China. Seeing the weakness of the general's position, she hatched a plan to defeat him without engaging him in battle.

While Gar Tridring was still loyally campaigning on China's borders, the empress cleverly offered a peace deal – not to the general himself, but directly to the tsenpo. The Tibetan court, like the army, was tired of battle. A peace deal would leave the last significant member of the Gar clan stranded, and the tsenpo knew it. He therefore accepted. Then he brought all of the members of the Gar clan – apart from Tridring, who was still in the field – together in a hunting party. This proved a deadly trap, and all members of the clan present were slaughtered. Before word could filter to Gar Tridring, the tsenpo led an army of his own towards China. When the army reached Tridring, he knew the

game was up. Neither his father nor his brothers had ever openly opposed the tsenpo, let alone led an army against him. To do so would undermine the sacred rationale for the whole Tibetan empire. In acting as it had, the Gar clan had only after all been ensuring that the tsenpo ruled over a kingdom befitting his majesty. Anyway, Tridring's army was exhausted and close to mutiny. Thus, as the tsenpo approached, the last of the Gars committed suicide and his army fled across the Chinese border.

Dusong had done it: the tsenpo was the true ruler of Tibet again. But Tibet was overstretched and Empress Wu's army was now pushing its soldiers back from the borders of China, out of Central Asia. The year was 692, just half a century after the Tibetans had started to create their own empire. In that time Tibet had become a participant in the currents of world culture, with its capital, Lhasa, developing into an unlikely cosmopolitan centre, home of Nepalese and Chinese nobility and a destination for foreign missionaries and merchants keen to have a stake in the new expanding empire.

Pushing into the deserts of Central Asia, the Tibetans had crossed and recrossed the ancient Silk Route arteries of world trade that carried silk, jade, spices and slaves between East and West. Of course, these trade routes were conduits for culture and ideas too. Ideas from Rome, Byzantium, Persia, India and China were passed along these ancient arteries throughout the first millennium, making the world a much more interconnected place than is often thought. Tibetan aristocrats wore Chinese silks and sipped Chinese tea; a Persian lion still stands over one of the tsenpo's tombs. As the seventh century drew to a close, Tibet was poised to take its place among the world's great cultures. But its own culture was still inchoate, a melting pot swirling with different ideas, rituals and technologies. And the Tibetans were about to encounter another young and vibrant culture: the Arabs. Yet, in the following century, the scales would start to tip towards the Buddhist religion, and the Buddhist holy land of India, as the defining influences on Tibetan culture.



2

The Holy Buddhist Empire, 700–797

DEATH IN LHASA

In the early eighth century Lhasa was a busy city. Another Chinese princess and her entourage had arrived to marry the tsenpo and, it was hoped, usher in another period of peace between Tibet and China. Life for anyone sent away from home to serve as a glorified diplomatic bartering chip was destined to be tough, but it went especially hard for Princess Jincheng. The Chinese emperor loved his adopted daughter dearly, and did nothing to hide his sadness in letting her go. He wrote a wordy letter to the tsenpo, which ended thus: ‘Princess Jincheng is our little daughter, and we are very fond of her, but as the father and mother of our subjects, we feel for the black-haired people. Since by granting their request and strengthening the bonds of peace, the borderlands will be untroubled and the officers and soldiers at rest, we sever the bond of affection for the good of the state.’ In practice, the bonds of affection were not so easily severed, however, and at the farewell banquet the emperor called over the Tibetan envoy and told him how young the princess was, and how hard it was for him to send her so far away. Then he broke down, sobbing on the envoy’s shoulder ‘for a long time’, as the Chinese historians note.¹

Even if the teenage princess managed to steel herself in the face of the emperor’s emotional outbursts before departure, she then had to face a dauntingly long journey over the Tibetan plateau.² It must have been some comfort that she had been given an entire mini-court to emigrate along with her,

placing her at the centre of a little Chinese cultural satellite in Lhasa. Some Chinese were nervous about offering the Tibetans such an insight into their own culture. When Jincheng asked for books to be sent to Lhasa, one minister advised the emperor to refuse. 'Your servant has heard that the Tibetans are naturally endowed with energy and perseverance, that they are intelligent and sharp, and untiring in their love of study,' he warned darkly. 'By reading these books they will certainly acquire a knowledge of war.' This minister, who was in charge of the public records, pointed out that Confucius had thought it better to give away cities than literary classics, and argued that it was not really the princess who was behind this request. But the emperor, either less convinced by the power of books or more trustful of the Tibetans, waved away the protest.³

Despite the comforting cushion of her portable Chinese court, the princess did not have an easy time in Lhasa. Her husband, the new tsenpo, was only a child. As Jincheng settled in to life as a queen, it could not have been long before she realised where the real power lay. Once again the tsenpo was a mere figurehead: this time it was his mother, Tri Malo, who was running the empire as Tibet's unofficial empress. It must have been galling for Jincheng, brought up as the darling of one of China's greatest emperors, to have ended up thousands of miles from home under the thumb of an all-powerful mother-in-law. After Tri Malo died in 712 the tsenpo was enthroned at the age of just eight, and given the title Tride Tsugtsen. Even then, Jincheng seems to have occasionally contemplated getting out; the death of her father left her particularly isolated, and in 723 the king of Kashmir received a secret letter from her asking whether she might be welcomed there as a guest in exile.⁴

In the end, there was no need for the princess to flee. Instead she found a role for herself in Tibet as a patron of Buddhism. First of all, Jincheng restored the Buddhist temple that her predecessor, Songtsen's Chinese bride, had established. As a good Confucian, she performed religious services for this ancestral spirit stranded among barbarians. As a good Buddhist, she made sure that the statue brought by the previous princess was properly honoured with regular offerings. Moreover, she tried to get the Tibetan court to practise funerals in the Buddhist way.

And so, when scores of wandering refugee monks began to arrive in Lhasa, Jincheng rushed to their aid. These were monks from India and Central Asia who had been expelled from China by the new emperor, who, unlike her father, was no friend of Buddhism. As they fled west along the Silk Route, the

monks were thrown out of each town they stayed in, until they arrived at last in Tibet, beyond the emperor's jurisdiction. Pleading with the tsenpo to help these refugees, Jincheng obtained the imperial seal of approval for her plan. The monks were invited to Lhasa, and they came, setting up a refugee camp nearby. Jincheng hurried down from the palace to talk to them. She particularly wanted to know if there were any other Buddhist refugees on Tibet's borders. Indeed there were, the monks told her. To the west, towards Kashmir, there were many more monks. Jincheng sent messengers to invite them to the capital as well.

As the refugee camp swelled, new monasteries were built to house the monks. Within a few years, Lhasa was home to a large immigrant community. If resentment stirred among the local Tibetans, it was ignored. Jincheng had not only found a role that suited her status, she had also made a real difference to the lives of these refugees. Then, three years after the arrival of the monks, disaster struck. A disease was spreading among the foreign monks and the local Tibetans of Lhasa. The afflicted developed a nasty rash, and many died. It was probably smallpox. Jincheng, ever charitable, was not the type to lock herself away in the palace. One day she discovered a pustule on her breast. It was the beginning of the end. As fever consumed her, Jincheng asked that her Chinese attendants, who numbered in the hundreds, be made Buddhist monks. This last wish was granted just before she died. But, with the epidemic raging, it was not a good time to be a Buddhist in Lhasa.⁵

Resentment about the large community of foreign monks now came into the open. People said that the foreigners had brought this plague upon Tibet, and they were probably right. Without Jincheng to speak up for them, popular feeling against the monks grew; in truth, many of the Tibetan ministers felt the same way. The inevitable order came: all monks should leave the kingdom. A few Tibetans who had joined the foreigners tried to challenge the anti-Buddhist feeling among the Tibetan government, arguing that Buddhism was no longer just a foreign movement. The meeting did not go well. 'If these monks are expelled,' the Tibetan monks threatened, 'we won't stay either.' To which, unsurprisingly, the ministers answered: 'Go where you like.'⁶

The epidemic passed. With the princess dead and the monks gone to find a more hospitable host, Lhasa was peaceful again in the 740s. But the image of Buddhism was tainted. All of Jincheng's Buddhist innovations had come to this, a terrifying plague. The old ways of worship had been neglected, and look what had happened. Anti-Buddhist feeling grew until the government decided

to pass laws against Buddhist practice. The limits of tolerance had been reached, for now.

THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION

What was the religious life of the Tibetans before Buddhism arrived? Since the latter grew to be so successful in Tibet, it is hard to say. The clans that had migrated to Central Tibet from the northern steppes had brought their own mythology and rituals with them: the stately funerals of the *tsenpos* were the most impressive examples. But the nomadic clans had settled among people who were already tending the land in the fertile valleys of Central Tibet, and who had their own rituals and customs. Add to that the religious ideas filtering in from India, China and Persia, and it becomes clear that there were already many layers of religious practice in Tibet before Buddhism arrived on the scene.⁷

One thing is clear: the Tibetans have always lived in a world swarming with spirits, demons and minor deities. All sorts of names for these still exist in Tibet. Sometimes it is said that the world is ruled by three types of spirit: the *lha* in the heavens, the *nyen* in the air and on the peaks of mountains, and the *lu* in the underworld and rivers. The mountain deities were particularly revered, with each clan having its own mountain and the clan leaders considering themselves the descendants of the mountain's divine embodiment. The mightiest mountain of all was Yarlha Shampo, from which the ancestor of the *tsenpos* first came down to earth.⁸

Though these deities were the most powerful in Tibet, there were many more. There were the warrior gods of each of the clans. There were the spirits of the mountains, rivers and lakes. There were the spirits of the house and the family. Get on the wrong side of them and they could make you very ill, or even kill you. But keep on good terms with them and they might assist you in all sorts of ways, healing your family, attacking your enemies, or helping you to predict the future. Fortunately, there have always been specialists to deal with the fickle world of the spirits. In the days of the empire they were known as *Bon* and *Shen*. These specialists carried out the delicate business of keeping the bad spirits at bay. A spirit could be summoned and trapped inside a special device made of coloured threads stretched over a cross made of wooden sticks. These devices are still used today and can be seen lying at crossroads, discarded there according to the old custom at the conclusion of a ritual.

Another popular way of tackling the spirits was through substitution. Little figurines of people, houses and the like were used to divert the spirits from their flesh-and-blood targets. These figurines can also be seen today, standing in the street and doing their work.

As well as keeping spirits at bay, the ritual specialists were able to make the spirits do their bidding. They acted as oracles, telling the future through special divination practices, or even allowing the spirits to speak directly through them. To keep the spirits happy, it might be necessary to put out food for them, or burn incense or branches of the fragrant juniper tree. For serious rituals, an animal sacrifice might be required – though this was discouraged by Buddhists. In short, the ritualists saw to the everyday needs of both the aristocrats and the ordinary folk, curing the sick, disposing of the dead, keeping malign influences at bay and ensuring the best of luck through fortune-telling.

This religion – if we can call it that – was mostly about day-to-day life. Before the arrival of Buddhism, there were already some vague ideas of an afterlife. Every person had a soul, called the *La*, which could survive death, either remaining at its tomb to receive offerings (like the souls of the *tsenpos*), wandering around and causing trouble, or departing to another realm, the afterlife in a happy land of the gods, or a land of suffering. Even in life one had to be careful to avoid one's soul leaving the body, which would cause sickness and eventually death. In such cases, a ritualist had to be brought in to call the soul back to its home. Some people had a soul tree, or a soul lake, or special turquoise stones carved into animal shapes as a home for their soul.⁹

All these beliefs and practices might fall within our idea of 'religion', but before Buddhism the Tibetans probably did not think of themselves as following any particular religion. Even though all of these beliefs are sometimes lumped together under the name *Bon*, we should be careful. In the earliest documents *Bon* is a kind of priest or ritual, not an organised religion. The early Tibetans did have some idea of religious practice, which was called *Chos* (pronounced *chö*). This was of two kinds: the religion of the gods, and the religion of men. If the religion of the gods was the job of the ritualists who liaised with the spirit world, the religion of men was the job of poets and storytellers.¹⁰

We have already seen how the exploits of culture heroes such as Gar Tongtsen were retold by the Tibetan bards. It was also the job of the latter to tell of the divine origin of the clans, thus justifying the rule of the clan leaders. In fact, all of the ceremonies that marked life in Tibet were accompanied by

poetic recitations telling the story behind the ritual. Storytelling was also a way of passing down wisdom and morality from one generation to the next, as it has been in cultures all over the world. Thus, through stories and poems it was ensured that everything in the world would remain in its proper place.

None of this – the world of the spirits, the ritual specialists who dealt with them and the techniques they used – ever left Tibet. When Buddhism triumphed in Tibet, it accommodated itself to this world, which remained fundamental to the lives of most Tibetans. Now we can see how these old ways preserved the established order: the rule of the *tsenpos*, the role of the clans, and the relationships between spirits, gods and human beings. And we can begin to understand why the sudden arrival in Lhasa of hundreds of Buddhist monks with their own ideas, rituals and newly built temples was seen at first as a dire threat to the established order, especially once the spirits had made their displeasure known through a terrible plague.

With the foreign monks expelled from Tibet, and their patron, the Chinese queen, dead, it must have seemed that the old ways were safe. The interference of Buddhist monks in the life of Lhasa must have looked like an irritating interruption. Certainly there was no reason to think of these outsiders as the harbingers of Tibet's religious future. The *tsenpo*, who had been a child when he married the Chinese queen, was growing old – indeed, he lived to be old enough to be remembered by the nickname *Me Agtsom*: 'Bearded Ancestor'. But it was not to be a peaceful old age: intrigues at the court swirled around him, and he eventually fell to assassins hired by two clan leaders.¹¹ Then, just as it seemed that the *tsenpos* might disappear for good, the greatest of the line appeared, asserting his authority under the banner of the Buddhist religion.

THE BALANCE OF POWER

With the infighting at the Tibetan court threatening to tip the country into civil war, and the Tang empire maintaining its stranglehold on the lucrative Silk Route, Tibet was in trouble. The Silk Route was vital for an economy that thrived on the export of luxuries such as musk, yaks' tails and fragrant honey. Faced with an impenetrable wall of Chinese soldiers to the east, in desperation the Tibetans turned to a new and dangerous power in the west: the Arabs. Forging an alliance with them, the Tibetans moved into the lands known today as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Now they could trade with the

West. Yet, by the early 750s, the Chinese were threatening to close these routes down too.¹²

Then suddenly, in the winter of 755, everything changed. The Tang empire was dealt a blow from which it would never really recover. It came from one of the emperor's most brilliant generals, a man called An Lushan. Though a favourite of the emperor, he surprised everybody by launching a military coup against the Tang dynasty. With his own private army Lushan waged war on the emperor's armies, defeating them over and over again, until he took the capital, Chang'an. He set himself up as emperor and in 756 announced the end of the Tang and the beginning of his own dynasty. It was clear to all that the balance of power in Asia was about to change. And in that same year Trisong Detsen was enthroned in Tibet.

At first the youthful new tsenpo was able to sit back and watch as China descended into chaos. In 757, Tang loyalists assassinated Lushan and called on the help of the Uighurs, a fearsome Turkic people, to wrest back control of China. By 763, the rebellion was over and a Tang emperor was on the throne again. But millions had died in the fighting and an accompanying famine, and the empire would never recover from its wounds. The Uighurs roamed the country, taking what they wanted. And all over the empire, especially in the far-flung colonial territories, local rulers threw off the yoke of rule from Chang'an.

Now Trisong Detsen made his first move as leader of the fearsome Tibetan army, sending his soldiers back onto the Silk Route. This proved spectacularly successful. Nothing illustrated the depths to which the Tang dynasty had fallen as dramatically as the Tibetans' daring conquest of Chang'an that winter. Though it only lasted a couple of weeks, the Tibetan occupation of the Chinese capital set the tone for a new phase of Sino-Tibetan relations. While the Chinese annalists continued to write as if their emperor was lord over all neighbouring 'barbarians', the Chinese now had to treat the Tibetans as equals, and reluctantly agree to treaties placing the Sino-Tibetan border only a few hundred miles from their capital. Though Chang'an remained in Chinese hands, the Tibetans camped frighteningly close by and attacked almost every autumn, the traditional nomadic campaigning season. One Chinese general lamented that, when faced with the might of the Tibetans, the Chinese forces were nothing but an easily frightened mob.¹³

One after another, the western cities, China's gateway to the Silk Route, fell to the Tibetan army. Since whoever controlled the Silk Route controlled trade,

wealth now flowed into Tibetan, instead of Chinese, coffers. One Chinese city held out against the Tibetans with particular tenacity: Dunhuang. For eleven years inhabitants were placed under siege by the Tibetan army. When, after the first year, the besieged governor talked of burning the city and fleeing, the commander of the Chinese troops murdered him and took his place. After seven more years of siege, the commander managed to sell off the city's supplies of silk to the Tibetans in exchange for food. But, two years later, there was no more food, and the commander went onto the city walls and offered to surrender as long as the Tibetans promised to let him and his people stay in the city. The Tibetans agreed.

The citizens of a Chinese city conquered by the Tibetans had to get used to a new way of life. The way the land was apportioned and taxes were levied, the way contracts and letters were written, all this altered. Tibetan became the language of government, law and business. Even the dates changed, the Chinese system of identifying the year by the name of the current emperor and the year of his reign being replaced by the twelve-year animal cycle of Tibetan astrology. Though this resulted in the problem that the year of the sheep, for example, came up every twelve years, you could explain *which* year of the sheep you meant by consulting the royal annals and checking what had happened in that particular sheep year. A few centuries later, the twelve animals were conjoined with five elements, so that sixty years would pass before you encountered another year of, for example, the wood sheep.

In any case, a few Tibetans took the highest posts in Dunhuang, making sure things ran smoothly, while the Chinese inhabitants had to wear Tibetan clothes, learn to write in the Tibetan alphabet, and work in the Tibetan civil service. The first generation to submit to Tibetan rule felt keenly the loss of their cultural identity, as the annals of the Tang dynasty tell us: 'The inhabitants of the city all adopted foreign dress and submitted to the enemy; but each year when they worshipped their ancestors they put on their Chinese clothes, and wept bitterly as they put them away again.' Indeed, Tibetan documents confirm that the Chinese were second-class citizens, with Tibetans in the lowest government positions still outranking Chinese in the highest.¹⁴

Popular revolts were not uncommon, and at least once the Tibetan rulers of Dunhuang were killed in a Chinese uprising. Yet Tibetan culture thrived in Dunhuang, and later generations, some of them from mixed marriages, grew up learning both the Tibetan and Chinese languages. Indeed, the city was to play a fateful part in the preservation of Tibetan culture. At the end of the tenth

century, thousands of manuscripts were placed in a nearby cave and sealed away, forgotten until their rediscovery in the twentieth century. These are now the earliest Tibetan documents extant anywhere in the world.

By the time Dunhuang fell, the Chinese emperor could see that there was no way the Tang dynasty was going to regain its former glory, so he agreed to a peace treaty allowing Tibet to keep its conquests on the Silk Route. Tibetan prisoners were freed and allowed to return to Tibet. In response, Trisong Detsen freed eight hundred Chinese prisoners: ‘generals, warriors and Buddhist monks’, according to the *Tang Annals*. Then in the early spring of 783, the two sides came together to formalise the treaty.

At the new border between Tibet and China, the city of Qingshui, a great altar was set up. On either side of the altar were massed ranks of Tibetans and Chinese, two thousand of each. Half were soldiers, standing with drawn weapons. The air must have been heavy with threat, and at first things did not go smoothly. Though both sides had agreed to solemnise the treaty by sacrificing an ox and a horse, the Chinese general, sickened by the idea of the treaty, demanded that a sheep, a pig and a dog be used instead. The Tibetans agreed, but nobody could find a pig, so the Tibetan general produced a wild ram instead. In accordance with the old custom, the animals were killed and their blood was collected in two bowls. The Tibetans and Chinese each took a bowl and smeared their mouths with the blood. Then the Tibetan general suggested that both parties should go into a Buddhist temple, temporarily set up in a tent on the other side of the altar, to burn incense and swear the oath again. After that, the two generals drank wine together and exchanged gifts. The whole tense business was over.

The written treaty spared the blushes of the Chinese emperor, beginning with the words ‘the Tang possess all under heaven’ before going on to cede all of the western regions previously held by the Chinese to the Tibetans. The Sino-Tibetan frontier was now established at Qingshui, at the eastern edge of modern Gansu province – perilously close to the Chinese capital. And there it remained until the fall of the Tibetan empire. Despite the favourable terms of the treaty, the Tibetans soon began to flout it, raiding further and further across the border, and taking territory north of the capital, effectively surrounding China on all sides except the east.¹⁵ The Chinese were not about to take this humiliation lying down. An ambitious Chinese general secured an alliance with the Arabs and the Uighur Turks. It was a bold move, and one that hurt the Tibetans, as they were drawn into a long war on their western

frontiers with the Arabs, who were enjoying a period of great strength under the famous caliph Harun al-Rashid. At the same time, the Uighur Turks were now fighting the Tibetans along the Silk Route.

Yet in the end these alliances were of limited benefit to China. A decisive Tibetan defeat of a joint Chinese–Turkic army in Central Asia in 791 put paid to Chinese ambitions to seize back control of the Silk Route. It would be nearly a thousand years before China regained these Central Asian territories, which are known today as the province of Xinjiang.¹⁶ It was the Tibetan empire that now bestrode the Silk Route, its borders reaching well beyond the Pamir mountains to the west, and deep within China to the east. Trisong Detsen had radically changed the balance of power on the Asian continent. At the same time, he was reshaping Tibetan society with his revolutionary decision to adopt Buddhism as the state religion.¹⁷

THE DHARMA KING

During Trisong Detsen's youth, anti-Buddhist feeling at the Tibetan court had hardened into an outright ban on Buddhist practice. The old religion was back in pride of place, and Buddhism was, it seemed, out of the running. To bring Buddhism back to Tibet would require a revolution of sorts, and this was what Trisong envisaged. In 762, he decided to tackle the anti-Buddhist faction head on. In a revolutionary edict, he declared that Buddhism was now the official religion of Tibet. Of course, as supreme leader he had the authority to do so, but it was a courageous act, not least because, as we have seen, the old religion provided the whole ritual and mythological culture that supported the divine authority of the tsenpos. Trisong invoked the example of his predecessors – hadn't Songtsen Gampo built Buddhist temples? In truth, no previous tsenpo had made anything like the commitment to Buddhism that Trisong now envisaged, but it helped his case that some of them had at least dabbled in Buddhist patronage.

Since the state adoption of Buddhism was so important for the future of Tibet's culture, we might well ask why it happened. Intentions are, of course, hard enough to divine in our contemporaries, let alone in figures from the distant past, but this has not stopped historians from trying to understand the conversion of Trisong Detsen. Tibet's traditional Buddhist historians saw it as a purely personal religious matter, a recognition of the truth of the Buddha's teachings and their potential benefits to the Tibetan people. Though there is

surely something in that view, modern scholars have tended to see the conversion of Trisong in a more political light. For one thing, the ministers who initially opposed his coming to the throne were from the anti-Buddhist faction, and adopting Buddhism as the state religion would have been a good way of placing them beyond the pale.

There was also a wider political context for Trisong Detsen's decision. Buddhism was an international religion. When the Tibetan empire expanded under Songtsen and his successors, it encountered Buddhist countries on every side. India, Nepal and China all had long histories of supporting Buddhist monks and monasteries. Buddhism was a cultural language spoken by all, whereas Tibet's own religion was specific to Tibet, and, despite being drawn from a variety of influences, must have seemed rather parochial. As Tibet's empire swallowed up further-flung cultures, including Buddhist ones, it was unlikely that Tibet's local religion would provide a cohesive cultural force. In truth, there was only one religion that could.

The Tibetans had, of course, encountered other religions. In 715, they had sent an embassy to an Arab governor requesting a teacher of Islam to be sent to Tibet. Later, an Arab writer recalled that, in the early ninth century, the king of Tibet adopted Islam and sent the caliph a golden idol, which was sent on to Mecca. Though the presence of a Tibetan statue of the Buddha – for that is surely what it was – in Mecca was an interesting anomaly, it did not survive there long. Apparently it was melted down a few years later by the governor of Mecca, not in a fit of iconoclasm but in order to enable him to strike gold coins. As for the tsenpo's adoption of Islam, this looks like a strategic fiction on the part of the tsenpo or a pious hope on the part of the historian.¹⁸

And the Christian Church had hopes for the Tibetans too. Timothy I, patriarch of the Nestorian Church between 780 and 823, wrote a letter listing the lands in which the *Trisagion*, one of the oldest Christian prayers, is recited: it included Tibet. In another letter, Timothy wrote that he had recently appointed a metropolitan bishop for the Turks and was just about to do the same for the Tibetans. Both letters date to the early 790s, during Trisong Detsen's reign. Then there are the crosses carved on rocks in Western Tibet, and sketched in manuscripts from Northeastern Tibet. But in the end it seems that, despite the hopes of the patriarch, the Tibetans were never very interested in Christianity either. The Persian religion of Manichaeism fared even less well, becoming the subject of a damning edict by Trisong Detsen, who branded its prophet Mani a 'great liar'.¹⁹

If the attraction of Buddhism over these other religions was partly its prestige among Tibet's neighbours, what about the Buddha's teachings themselves? The missionary pamphlets of Tibet's first Buddhists, written to convert adherents of the old religions, emphasise one thing again and again: karma, the Buddha's fundamental teaching on cause and effect. The word literally means 'actions'. The Buddha taught that our current situation in this life is the result of our previous actions, and only through our actions can we change this situation for the better. This was a radical contradiction of the Tibetan belief that the way to avoid misery and ensure happiness was to worship and placate the gods and spirits. As one of these pamphlets stated: 'There is no other expert – you have to do it yourself.'

The Buddhist missionaries also tried to replace the rather simplistic ideas in the old religion of either a happy or an unhappy afterlife with the Buddhist idea of rebirth. This is the argument that consciousness continues after the death of the body, not as a permanent soul, but as an ever-changing flux impelled only by the force of previous actions. These previous actions determine whether one is reborn in one of the lower realms of hell-beings, ghosts and animals, or the higher realms of humans, demigods and gods. The missionaries argued that in Buddhism rebirth in the higher realms was open to everyone. The pamphlet quoted above goes on to say:

The mighty Buddha is hugely compassionate and makes everyone equal. He protects everyone without making distinctions. This is excellent. Anyone who tries to go to the land of the gods through committing sins will not be liberated to the place of joy. You may say 'whoever stops this worship will fall into hell,' but it is actually you who have the power to choose between joy and suffering. You have the excellent religion – practise it in accordance with the eternal teachings.²⁰

As well as teaching that karma was the true agent of happiness and sorrow, the missionaries spoke of a state entirely beyond the cycle of rebirth. This was the state of the Buddha himself, free from the ordinary mind's mistaken concepts of 'self' and 'other' and suffused with compassion. The worship of local deities never died out in Tibet, but Buddhism provided a significant alternative to this spirit world, a broader framework that was attractive to those who envisioned a new international role for the Tibetan empire. Even if the adoption of Buddhism as Tibet's national religion was at first a political move, it soon came

to have a religious significance as Tibetans became convinced of the efficacy of the Buddha's teachings. And if Buddhism was at first the religion of the court, it gradually became the religion of the people too, thanks to the efforts of Trisong Detsen and his successors to propagate Buddhism throughout the empire.²¹

THE GREAT MONASTERY

Trisong Detsen had made his mark in the international arena of politics and war. He had shown the scale of his ambition in the conquest of the Chinese capital, and the strength of his resolve in holding Tibet's imperial borders against attacks by the Arabs, the Turks and the Chinese. In this he had surpassed the achievements of his ancestors, even Songtsen Gampo, the greatest of the tsenpos. And he had similar ambitions for Buddhism in Tibet. Everything that had been done by his predecessors in a haphazard and piece-meal fashion, he would do properly.

The establishment of Buddhism in Tibet by Trisong Detsen became a kind of foundation myth for later Tibetan Buddhists, an idealised time of pure religious aspirations. But earlier histories suggest that things actually got off to a rather shaky start. We can follow the story in one of the very earliest Buddhist histories, the accounts of the Ba clan. At the beginning of Trisong's reign, while he was still a teenager, the ban on Buddhism was in full swing. The statue of the Buddha brought by Songtsen Gampo's Chinese bride was taken out of the temple and buried. Two of Lhasa's Buddhist temples were converted into slaughterhouses, with carcasses hanging off the arms of the statues and entrails wound around their necks. Buddhist funeral rituals, particularly despised because funerals were the speciality of Tibet's non-Buddhist priests, were banned.

But the Buddhist rituals were not so easily suppressed. When a Lhasa noble called Ba Selnang lost his son and his daughter at the same time, he arranged for a traditional Tibetan ritual to be performed outside his house, but asked an old Chinese monk to come secretly into the house to perform the Buddhist ritual as well. The old monk asked Selnang if he wanted the two children to be reborn as gods or humans. The father replied that they should be reborn as gods, but the mother wanted them to be reborn again as her own children. The old monk placed a pearl, half of which was painted red, in the mouth of each child and performed the ritual. Afterwards he told the parents

that the son would be reborn in the god realm, while the daughter would be reborn as their next child. And, indeed, when another child was born to the family, he grew up with a half-red pearl on his tooth. Understandably impressed, Ba Selnang became a convert to Buddhism, which he practised in secret.

When Trisong Detsen wanted somebody to find a high-ranking Buddhist teacher, Ba Selnang put himself forward. He travelled to Nepal, where he met an eminent Buddhist abbot called Shantarakshita, and invited him to Tibet. However, when Shantarakshita arrived in Lhasa, Trisong had second thoughts, worried by the possibility that the abbot might be smuggling in foreign spirits and black magic. Shantarakshita was quarantined inside Lhasa's Jokhang temple, where he kicked his heels for several months. Since nobody at the Tibetan court could speak Shantarakshita's language, men were sent out to find a translator. In the end they found a Brahmin called Ananta, an educated man who had been sent into exile in Tibet after his father was convicted of a serious crime. Ananta was brought to the Jokhang and translated while Shantarakshita was subjected to cross-examination by one of the tsenpo's ministers. Finally, when Trisong was satisfied that he posed no danger to Tibet, Shantarakshita was brought before the tsenpo and, with Ananta still translating, explained the Buddha's teachings. It was this explanation that finally convinced him to authorise the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet.²²

Now Trisong Detsen started to make plans for a vast Buddhist monastery that would dwarf everything that had been built in Tibet before. But as word spread, a series of disasters struck, including a Buddhist temple being flooded and the royal castle at Lhasa being hit by lightning. People at court started murmuring about the tsenpo's patronage of Buddhism causing the anger of the local gods once again, and Trisong Detsen decided that he had better send Shantarakshita back to Nepal until things cooled down a bit.

After enough time had passed to calm the anti-Buddhist feeling at court an invitation was extended to Shantarakshita again. The abbot, showing considerable patience towards the Tibetans, accepted. But this time he brought a reinforcement with him in the form of a tantric adept called Padmasambhava. Hailing from the Swat valley in modern Pakistan, Padmasambhava was a specialist in demon-taming rituals. Shantarakshita introduced him to the tsenpo, and pointed out that what Tibet really required was the magical power of tantric Buddhism: Padmasambhava was the man to do what was needed, subduing Tibet's unruly gods and spirits, and impressing the Tibetans with tantric feats.

As soon as they arrived, Padmasambhava, along with Shantarakshita and a Nepalese construction expert, began to plan the tsenpo's new temple, which was to be called Samye, 'The Inconceivable'. Padmasambhava identified the spirits that had been causing trouble through a special divination practice using a mirror. Then he summoned them by calling out their names and their clans, and forced them to take human form. Once they were visible in the room, Padmasambhava threatened them and Shantarakshita taught them about karma with the aid of a Tibetan translator. When they were finished, Padmasambhava told the tsenpo that he was now free to practise Buddhism in Tibet.

The construction of the new monastery began. Problems continued, however. Padmasambhava was disliked by many at the Tibetan court. He expounded the powerful tantric methods of Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, and was particularly keen on discovering new sources of water and introducing new methods of irrigation to transform the landscape around Lhasa. But, coming from a foreigner, these ambitious plans seemed to annoy the Tibetan nobles. Some of them started a whispering campaign against Padmasambhava, suggesting that he was intending to seize power from the tsenpo. These rumours had their desired effect when Trisong Detsen began to be suspicious of the foreign sorcerer. Cautiously, and politely, he suggested to Padmasambhava that he had done what was necessary and should return to Nepal.

Padmasambhava was angry. 'I thought', he said afterwards, 'that the teachings could be established firmly in the land of Tibet, so that the whole country could be led to virtue, and become a prosperous and happy land. But the tsenpo was narrow-minded and greatly jealous and suspected that I might seize his political power. I don't even desire universal power, so how could I want the power of such a king?' He left Lhasa, but, still afraid that Padmasambhava would somehow bring it harm, the Tibetan court sent archers after him. Padmasambhava made these would-be assassins freeze like paintings, and continued on his way unharmed. His sojourn in Tibet had been brief, but his full legacy would only become apparent in later centuries when he would rise to fill the role of Tibetan culture hero as the 'Precious Teacher', Guru Rinpoche.²³

With the tensions over Padmasambhava resolved, the construction of Samye continued apace. The aristocrats joined Trisong Detsen in planning and overseeing the temple's construction, and some of the best-looking local Tibetans were taken as models for the faces of the new statues being built for the monastery. At the same time a group of Tibetans were ordained into the

Buddhist *sangha* – the community of monks. The layout of Samye itself was based on the great Indian monastic complex of Odantapuri in Bihar. The three-storeyed main building at the centre is said to have been designed with its first storey in the Indian style, the second in the Chinese style, and the third in the Khotanese style. Four temples surrounded it in each of the four directions, and a boundary wall encircled the whole complex. The monastery also reflected an Indian idea of the map of the world, with the *axis mundi* of Mount Meru at the centre and four outlying continents in each of the four cardinal directions.

Completed at last in the 780s, Samye still stands today in the valley of the Tsangpo river, despite near-destruction in the civil unrest of the tenth century, a great fire in the seventeenth century, an earthquake in the nineteenth, and the Cultural Revolution of the twentieth. Though another storey was subsequently added to the main temple, and other buildings were constructed within the perimeter wall, Samye preserves Trisong Detsen's original design plan. Just to the left of the entrance to the main temple is a pillar set there by the tsenpo, a memorial to the occasion when he and his court gathered there to swear an oath to protect Buddhism in Tibet. The text on the pillar reads:

The supports for the Three Jewels set up in the temples of Rasa, Dragmar and elsewhere – and the practice of Buddhism there – must never be abandoned or destroyed. The supply of all that is needed must never be diminished or reduced. From now on every generation in the lineage of the tsenpos must make this vow. So that no violation of this oath should be perpetrated, we invoke the worldly and transworldly gods and the non-human beings as auspicious witnesses. The tsenpo and his sons and the lords and ministers have all made this promise together upon their own heads. A detailed version of this oath exists elsewhere.²⁴

Indeed, the detailed versions of this oath were copied and sent all over the kingdom, from Zhangzhung in the west to Amdo in the northeast. Whereas in the past imperial support for Buddhism had been rather tentative – Songtsen Gampo's small temples, or the guarded support for the refugee monks from Khotan – Trisong Detsen in his mission to bring Buddhism to Tibet now showed the same determination and thoroughness evident in his military command. He was serious about committing Tibet to the practice of Buddhism, and this time there would be no going back.

THE GREAT DEBATE

To begin with, Trisong Detsen looked to both India and China for the Buddha's teachings. The nobleman Ba Selnang, who was sent to Nepal to invite Shantarakshita to Tibet, was also despatched to seek the advice of Chinese teachers. The accounts of the Ba family tell how Selnang journeyed to China, where he met a Buddhist monk from Korea. This monk turned out to be a famous Zen teacher known as Reverend Kim, who advised the Tibetan on the best scriptures to show the tsenpo in order to persuade him to follow Buddhism. He also taught him to meditate using the methods of Zen, in which the meditator recognises that the enlightened state is already present within, obscured by everyday thoughts.²⁵

After further adventures in China, where he even met the emperor, Selnang returned to Tibet. One result of this journey was that Zen teachers were invited to Tibet. One of the most popular was a monk called Moheyan, who had been teaching in Dunhuang, the Silk Route city conquered by Trisong Detsen in the 780s. But Zen's radical tendencies were disliked by some of the Indian Buddhist teachers in Lhasa. As followers of the Mahayana, or 'Greater Vehicle' of Buddhism, all were in agreement about basic principles. Their aim was to transcend samsara, the vicious cycle of suffering, and to bring all living beings to the state of enlightenment. The dispute concerned how to achieve this. The Indian Buddhists insisted on the need to combine meditation with rational analysis and the basic practices of ethical conduct. For Buddhists of the Greater Vehicle this combination was summarised by the Six Perfections: giving, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom. By contrast, the Zen teachers said that if one recognised the true nature of one's own mind, the Perfections could be dispensed with.

This doctrinal disagreement soon threatened to blow up into a full-scale religious controversy. The Indian teachers and their students started complaining to Trisong Detsen that the Chinese Buddhists were not teaching genuine Buddhism, and should be stopped. When the tsenpo seemed to be inclining to support the Indian faction, the Chinese side started a rather extreme protest. One of the Tibetan Zen students gashed his own body, another crushed his own genitals, and a Chinese teacher set fire to his own head. Some thirty other adherents of the Chinese side went to the tsenpo armed with knives and threatened to kill the Indian teachers before committing collective suicide.²⁶

Consulting with the Tibetan abbot of Samye, Trisong Detsen decided that the civilised way to put an end to this unedifying dispute among the Buddhists was a formal debate. The Indian abbot Shantarakshita had passed away, but he had told the tsenpo to call on his student Kamalashila if there was any disagreement about the practice of Buddhism. Kamalashila, a great Indian scholar in his own right, was asked to come and represent the Indian side in the debate, while Moheyan was asked to argue the Chinese side. On the day of the debate the two sides entered one of the smaller temples at the Samye complex. The tsenpo sat enthroned in the middle, with Moheyan seated on his right side and Kamalashila on his left. Behind them their disciples lined up in two rows.

Both debaters were good Buddhists of the Greater Vehicle and agreed on the basic principle that samsara was a product of deluded thoughts and emotions, and both agreed that ultimately there were no permanent and independent things, both the personal self and external phenomena being part of a network of interdependence, existent only in a relative sense. This insight, known as 'emptiness', is expressed in the words of the Heart Sutra: 'form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.' What the two sides disagreed about was how that insight was to be realised. As Moheyan stepped up to begin the debate, he put his position very succinctly, saying that it was only by stopping ordinary thought that the cycle of samsara could come to an end. Both virtuous and sinful actions, the very distinction between them belonging to ordinary thought, were part of the problem. They were like black and white clouds; both blocked out the sun. The Buddha's teachings on the practice of virtue were for his duller disciples. The sharpest could get straight to the point by abandoning ordinary thought.

Then Kamalashila stepped up, bristling with philosophical refutations. Moheyan's whole approach went against his scholarly training. Real wisdom, he said, came about through analytical insight. To abandon analysis would be to cut off wisdom at its root. The practice of analytical insight was in fact the way to transcend concepts, for it was analysis that undermined the validity of concepts as anything but conventional labels. So, for Kamalashila, the Chinese teacher's attempt to achieve a state of non-conceptualisation without analysis was not a genuine method, and would just result in a state akin to that of someone who has fainted: 'a practice', as he put it, 'of stupidity'.

After further exchanges, the debate was concluded, and victory awarded to the Indian side. The result was that the tsenpo would now support only those

who taught the path of gradual practice, and would reject the instantaneous approach of the Zen teachers. By extension, Buddhist scriptures from India would be preferred over those from China. This, anyway, is the Tibetan version of the story. Some ancient manuscripts indicate that Moheyan had a more nuanced view of meditation, and a Chinese version of the debate concludes with the tsenpo giving his blessing to the Chinese teachers. Modern scholars have even questioned whether a debate ever really took place, or whether there was instead a series of discussions and literary exchanges. But you can't keep a good story down, and the narrative of the debate at Samye became a fundamental part of the consciousness of Tibet's Buddhists. The need for the graduated path, and the preference for India as the source of true Buddhism, came to characterise Tibetan Buddhism more and more over the next centuries, and the debate story justified this position.

One thing we can say for sure is that when it came to translating the Buddha's words, India, not China, became the great source. How could it be otherwise, when India was itself the home of the thousands of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries translated into Chinese? Now Trisong Detsen sent invitations out to more Buddhist teachers from India and Nepal. Once in the Tibetan capital, they teamed up with Tibetans who had learned Sanskrit in order to translate great swathes of Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan. This translation project, undertaken with great seriousness, began to build one of the world's largest religious canons, the collection of Buddhist scriptures translated into Tibetan. When these were collected together centuries later they filled some three hundred volumes.

This astonishing feat remains, as one modern scholar has put it, among the greatest achievements of the medieval world.²⁷ It required a transformation of the Tibetan language, as hundreds of new terms were invented for the technical vocabulary of Buddhist Sanskrit, and it resulted in the wholesale import of one culture into another. Tibetan Buddhism would develop its own flavour and individual approaches to the Buddha's teachings, but all of this flowed from the faithful translation work that began in earnest under Trisong Detsen.

An apparent contradiction embodies Trisong Detsen's reign. In a series of bloody wars the tsenpo had carved out an empire that was wider than that of any of his predecessors. At the same time, he had embraced a religion that eschews violence. Yet there was nothing new in warlike rulers adopting Buddhism, and Trisong Detsen would no doubt have argued that in his military campaigns he was working towards securing Tibet's borders so that it

might then enjoy peace with its neighbours. Though he failed to achieve peace in his own lifetime, Trisong Detsen certainly laid the groundwork for the Tibetan empire to exist as an equal with its neighbours, the Chinese, the Arabs and the Turks.

Trisong Detsen's achievements would shape not only the future of Tibet, but that of Mongolia and China as well. His twin concerns, to expand the empire and spread Buddhism, made the Inner Asian reaches of the Tibetan empire receptive to Tibetan Buddhism long after the fall of the empire itself. This would make it possible in later centuries for Tibet to enter into relationships with the Mongols based on their shared religious heritage. It also led to China being governed for centuries by two Inner Asian dynasties that followed Tibetan Buddhism: first the Mongols and then the Manchus. Thanks to Trisong Detsen, Tibet's cultural influence would extend much further than its frontiers.



3

Keepers of the Flame, 797–1054

THE LAST EMPERORS

In a corner of a Lhasa street there is a curious monument that is usually ignored by locals and tourists flocking to the nearby Jokhang temple. It is a stone pillar about ten feet high, with an ornamental cap, and it is one of the very oldest things in the city. It was put there in the 820s to mark a treaty between the Tibetan tsenpo and the Chinese emperor. By that time the Buddhist empire known as Greater Tibet spanned much of Central Asia, and had its talons in China and Southeast Asia. It was a military machine run from the great tented encampments of the tsenpo and his aristocratic ministers and generals. But it was not to last.

The tensions that emerged every time a new tsenpo came to power were the harbingers of the bitter schism that would one day tear Tibet to pieces. As the great tsenpo Trisong Detsen prepared to step down, they now came to the fore again. At first, it seemed that Trisong Detsen had done everything right when, in 797, he abdicated in favour of his eldest son, who had been preparing for the throne all his life. But something went wrong, and this son died after ruling for barely a year. Traditional Tibetan histories portray this doomed ruler as a naïve idealist, trying to put the Buddhist principles of universal compassion into practice by eradicating the difference between the rich and the poor. They also say that his reforms failed; some modern Tibetans claim that this is why they knew from an early stage that communism would never work in Tibet.

After this suspicious death another son was hurried onto the throne. Senaleg had not been prepared for power, so Trisong Detsen returned to the throne alongside him. But the old tsenpo only had a few more years left, and after he died conflict flared again. Senaleg had not strictly been the next in line for the throne, and there was another son who resented being passed over and now declared himself the rightful tsenpo. Senaleg had to regain the momentum, and he did. The challenger died in 804, and though the sources omit to say how, it is likely that it was murder that resolved the dispute.¹

Senaleg may have resorted to killing his brother, and he certainly did not blanch at waging war, but he followed his father's Buddhist convictions. Buddhism penetrated the Tibetan court even more deeply during his reign. Two of his closest advisors were monk ministers who operated at the highest political levels, ensuring that the Buddhist initiatives of Trisong Detsen's time weren't allowed to stagnate. The translation of India's Buddhist literature continued apace. Senaleg put his name to an edict standardising the Tibetan language and setting out firm rules for translators. In time, this would ensure the remarkable consistency of the Tibetan Buddhist canon; for now, it meant that thousands of pages of translations had to be revised and rewritten, a time-consuming and horribly expensive operation.

Meanwhile, the Tibetans continued to wage war at the borders of their empire. Their main opponents were now the Arabs, newly invigorated under Harun al-Rashid and his sons. Neither Tibetan nor Arab historians have much to say about these conflicts, though one Arabic source tells us that the Tibetans progressed as far as Samarkand, to which they laid siege. As for China, the Tang dynasty had been fatally wounded by the rebellions of the eighth century, and never convincingly stood up to the Tibetans again. The last of the epoch's Sino-Tibetan treaties was sworn in 822, setting a border between Tibet and China on terms dictated by the Tibetans.

The pillar in Lhasa commemorating this treaty was originally one of three, the second being in Chang'an, and the third on the Sino-Tibetan border in Qingshui (at the eastern border of the modern province of Gansu). The writing on the pillar is in Tibetan and Chinese. The east face of the pillar sets out the terms of the treaty, the west face the history leading up to it, while the north and south faces give the names of the Tibetan and Chinese signatories. The treaty recalls the close allegiances between the Chinese emperors and Tibetan tsenpos of the past, especially the marriages of Chinese princesses to Tibetan tsenpos. Based on these, the relationship between the Chinese and the

Tibetans is described as being like that between a father-in-law and a son-in-law. This phrase was a concession allowed by the Tibetan side to China's sense of superiority over its neighbouring 'barbarians' and the Confucian ideal that the emperor should both conquer these barbarians and instruct them in virtue in a fatherly manner.²

In the actual terms of the treaty, the two countries were equals, however. It reads: 'The two countries, Tibet and China, guard the land and the frontier now in their possession. All to the east of that frontier is the land of Greater China, and all to the west is indeed the land of Greater Tibet. Thereafter both sides shall not struggle like enemies, shall not lead armies into war, and shall not invade and seize each other's territory.' The oath itself was solemnised in the terms of both Buddhism and the traditional ritual of animal sacrifice: 'After the great governments under which the Tibetans are happy in the Tibetan land and the Chinese are happy in the Chinese land are united, a treaty that is made like this may never change. May we invoke the Three Jewels [the Buddha, his teachings, and those who follow them], the various saints, the sun and the moon, and the planets and stars as witnesses. Having declared this with solemn words, after the animals have been sacrificed and the oath has been sworn, the treaty is made.'

The Chinese annals recall the arrival of the Chinese delegates at the Tibetan court, which was still a mobile residence, a vast tented encampment, with the tsenpo's tent in the very middle, surrounded by a fence of spears. Within this enclosure, halberds were planted in the ground every ten paces. In the middle, great flags flapped in the wind. At each gate to the residence there were armed guards and priests wearing bird-shaped hats and tiger girdles. Inside, the tsenpo sat on a platform ornamented with gold dragons, lizards, tigers and leopards. He was dressed in plain cloth, with his head bound in a turban of bright red silk. At his right-hand side was the prime minister, a Buddhist monk called Palgyi Yonten. The other ministers sat below the platform.

That night, a great feast with meat and wine was held, and the musicians played popular Chinese songs. The next day the swearing of the treaty was performed at a ceremonial altar. The small Chinese delegation sat on one side, and the ten chief ministers of Tibet, along with over a hundred clan chiefs, sat on the other. In the middle of the altar the monk prime minister Palgyi Yonten stood and recited the treaty, with a translator beside him for the benefit of the Chinese delegation. When the time came to make the animal sacrifice Palgyi Yonten stood aside, not protesting the killing, but declining to smear his lips with blood. After that was over, Palgyi Yonten presided over a

Buddhist version of the oath in which ceremonial water was drunk before an image of the Buddha. Then, with mutual congratulations all round, the treaty was concluded. The ceremony had shown how Buddhism had come to an accord with the old traditions after the death of Trisong Detsen. The priests continued in their traditional roles, and the old ceremonies, including the sacrifice of animals, were still performed. But now monks performed Buddhist ceremonies alongside them.³

By the time the treaty was signed, there was another tsenpo on the throne. His name was Tritsug Detsen, but he was better known as Ralpachen, 'The long-haired', after his long braided hair. Either Ralpachen was personally the most fervent of the Buddhist emperors, or he was deeply under the sway of Palgyi Yonten and other influential monks. During his reign, more of Tibet's wealth was spent on Buddhist projects than ever before: perhaps more than was wise. New monasteries were under construction throughout the empire, and the cost of maintaining them fell upon the local population. Each monastery was granted two hundred households to provide it with food. The monastery owned these in the same way as an aristocrat. Though this system would soon break down, it would later return in an even stronger form than before, with the monasteries becoming the biggest landowners in Tibet.⁴

With Ralpachen building so many monasteries, more of the empire's wealth was being absorbed by Buddhism. The tsenpo also sent out edicts to all of his lands ordering the production of vast numbers of Buddhist books. In every corner of the empire a short work on the ten Buddhist virtues was copied and circulated, with the aim of instilling Buddhist ethics in everyone under the empire. These ten virtues are: no actions that involve killing, stealing or improper sex; no speech that involves lies, slander, abuse or gossip; and no covetous, hateful or perverse thoughts.⁵

At the same time hundreds of copies of prestigious scriptures, such as the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras were made. In most Buddhist cultures there is great merit in certain activities, such as making donations to monks, helping to build temples, making statues and copying the scriptures. As these help to spread the Buddha's teachings, they are one of the best things a Buddhist can do, and through the infallible system of cause and effect, or karma, they will help one towards happiness in this life and a good rebirth in the next.⁶

Not surprisingly, the sudden spread of Buddhism throughout Tibet caused resentment among some Tibetans. The conspicuous new monks encountered

abuse in the streets, ranging from muttered comments to shouted insults. Ralpachen is said to have announced a series of harsh punishments for anyone who so much as looked at a monk in the wrong way. He is also said to have shown his respect for eminent visiting monks by having a thread tied to a braid of his hair at one end, and the cloth on which the monk sat at the other, symbolically placing the monk above his head. In fact, Ralpachen was a rather feeble figure, who lacked the strong personality of a ruler, or the mental acuity to deal with the challenges facing the empire. The power behind the throne seems to have been the monk minister who had presided over the signing of the Sino-Tibetan treaty, Palgyi Yonten. The great increase in support for Buddhist institutions during Ralpachen's reign was probably a direct result of the power wielded by this monk.

But the court was becoming polarised, and Palgyi Yonten's Buddhist agenda was about to backfire badly. The aristocrats who disliked this agenda or were out of favour formed a secret group of revolutionaries. Their first target was Palgyi Yonten himself. The conspirators spread a rumour that the monk was having an affair with one of the queens. Ralpachen, lacking judgement and filled with suspicion, sent Palgyi Yonten into exile. The conspirators, leaving nothing to chance, then despatched assassins to kill the monk. According to one version of the story, Palgyi Yonten hid in an underground bunker, but was discovered there by a blind man and subsequently killed. But that was not enough to satisfy the discontented nobles: they flayed the corpse and stretched the skin across a frame to make a kind of dummy. Afterwards Palgyi Yonten's relatives burned his remains, and from the smoke his spirit is said to have emerged as a white light. When one of his sisters called out in grief, the light turned red, a great wind blew up and Palgyi Yonten's ghost swore vengeance on his killers.⁷

The fact that Ralpachen allowed his most trusted minister to be treated like this shows how weak he had become. In the later years of his reign, his mental state declined so much that he was no longer fit to rule his kingdom: he remained in place as a figurehead while his ministers, and his brother Darma Wudunten, made the real decisions. Compared to Ralpachen, Darma cut a strikingly different figure. A tough guy who later earned the nickname Lang, 'The Ox', he was fond of wine and hunting parties. He was an unlikely candidate for the position of tsenpo, but the conspirators started to gravitate around him.⁸ With Darma waiting in the wings, the leaders of the Ba and Chogro clans plotted the assassination of Ralpachen. They arranged to see the tsenpo alone while he was staying in his castle outside Lhasa, and came upon him drinking

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beer and enjoying the sunshine in the gardens. Suddenly, they grabbed him and twisted his head until his neck snapped. It was the beginning of the end for the Tibetan empire.⁹

DOWNFALL

With little opposition, Darma the Ox was placed on the bloodstained throne of Greater Tibet. While the new tsenpo continued to enjoy his lifestyle of drinking, hunting and partying, the ministers who had brought him to power set about drastically cutting the spending on Buddhist projects. They shut down the college that trained translators, where thousands of Buddhist scriptures had been rendered into Tibetan over the past hundred years. That was the end of that. The last great temple that Ralpachen had commissioned, Onchangdo, was left without the performance of a final consecrating ritual, so remaining an empty shell.¹⁰

The Tibetan court was purged of the remaining Buddhist monk ministers, and the monasteries lost many of their privileges. With the life of a monk becoming more and more difficult, many disrobed and went back to lay life. Among the remaining monks there was no doubt that Darma was the source of their troubles. So once again a plan was hatched to assassinate the tsenpo. The shocking difference was that this time the assassin would be a Buddhist monk. Lhalung Palgyi Dorje was the ninth abbot of Samye, the great temple built in the reign of Trisong Detsen. He knew, of course, that killing was absolutely against the Buddha's moral code. He knew that the law of cause and effect meant that killers were likely to be reborn as animals, or even in the fearful hell-realms. But he decided, as the most visible, perhaps the highest-ranking Buddhist in Tibet, to take the responsibility on himself. The abbot would be the assassin.

His chance came one day when Darma was out and about in Lhasa with his entourage. Disguising himself in an official's robes, Lhalung took up a bow and arrow and rode out to find the tsenpo. When he came across the royal party, Darma was sitting at the base of the Sino-Tibetan treaty pillar, reading the inscription. Lhalung approached and bowed to the ground three times in the traditional way. At the first salutation, he pulled back the bow. The tsenpo looked up, but thought nothing of it. At the second salutation, he fitted the arrow to the string. At the third salutation, he loosed the arrow, which plunged into the heart of the tsenpo, who fell to the ground mortally wounded.

Suddenly there was confusion everywhere, and shouts of ‘the tsenpo has been murdered!’ Lhalung mounted his horse and fled, galloping away from Lhasa, never to return. According to the Buddhist historians, he used a clever ploy to avoid being captured. Before setting out to find the king, he chose a white horse and blackened its coat with coal. Then he put on a fur coat that was white on the outside and black on the inside. When he shot the tsenpo, he shouted: ‘I am the Black Spirit!’ Once outside Lhasa, however, he rode through a lake and washed the coal dust from the coat of his horse, then turned his coat inside out, and declared: ‘I am the White Spirit of the Sky!’¹¹

Thus Lhalung escaped, taking some Buddhist books with him, and headed for Kham, far to the east. The transformation from black to white has symbolic significance, of course. Lhalung’s deed has both a dark and a light side. He killed a man, but only to preserve the Buddha’s teaching in Tibet. One can find some justification for such an action in Buddhism itself, which did not shy away from difficult ethical dilemmas. In exceptional cases, it was said that a bodhisattva could kill to save the lives of others. For the Buddhist monks who later wrote the history of Tibet, the assassination of Lang Darma was just such an exceptional case. The deed may have looked black, but really it just white: the demon was a good spirit in disguise.

As Lhalung rode into the darkening east, the sun setting behind him, the situation in Central Tibet was dire. It was the year 842, and Darma had no clear heir. A baby had just been born to one of the junior queens, but the senior queen wanted to be part of the succession. She had not been able to conceive an heir herself, so her family found her a baby and she claimed to have given birth to it. Some say that when the queen showed the baby at court, he already had teeth, causing the queen to be questioned closely. Eventually the courtiers accepted her word, and the child became known as Yumten, ‘Supported by the Mother’. But the baby of the junior queen, Osung, also had his supporters among his mother’s own clan.

Once again, the tensions in Tibet were straining the unity of the empire to breaking point. For two centuries, the clans had only just been kept under control by the tsenpos. Now, with two tsenpos supported by different clans, the old hostilities threatened to break out in civil war. Plus the empire was overstretched. No major new territories had been conquered for years. A series of poor harvests had left the government poorer, and the people near starvation. It was an ideal climate for discontent, perhaps even revolution.

In fact, the whole of Asia was tottering. In China, the Tang dynasty was struggling to maintain its hold over the country. With funds running out, the Buddhist monasteries were more and more tightly controlled; eventually most were shut down, their precious statues being melted down to feed the government's coffers. The Turkic empire which had ruled over Central Asia was being smashed up by other nomadic warriors, while the last great Turks, the Uighurs, fled into Central Asia, destabilising the lands held by the Tibetans in the process.

And Greater Tibet now fractured as the royal houses of the two Tibetan princes split the empire between them. The house of Osung tried to turn the clock back to the time before Darma's reign, ploughing money back into Buddhist projects that reached into the distant corners of the empire, while the house of Yumten consolidated its power in Central Tibet. The aristocratic Tibetans sided with one house or the other, or just looked after their own interests.

The silken cloth of the Tibetan empire first began to fray and unravel at the edges. Dunhuang, the Silk Route city that we last saw being captured and converted to Tibetan ways in the previous chapter, fell in 848 to a Chinese warlord, who called his army 'The Return to Allegiance'.¹² Disorder soon spread to the centre of Tibet. Some thought that the vengeful ghost of the assassinated monk minister Palgyi Yonten was behind the troubles. He was said to have been seen in places where the trouble was spreading, riding an iron-grey wolf and beating the ground with an iron staff. It was said that he went from place to place inciting the gods and demons of Tibet to kill all of the aristocrats, or at least to scatter them in every direction. This appalling figure was a powerful symbol of the fear and confusion of the times.¹³

Still clinging to the old ways, the descendants of the split royal line tried to maintain power, but any semblance of authority was finally shattered by a major uprising that shook the whole of Central Tibet at the beginning of the tenth century. The clan leaders whose ancestors had sworn oaths of support to the first great tsenpos, and whose cooperation had allowed the Tibetan empire to come into being, now turned against the tsenpos. It was obvious that the unity achieved by Songtsen Gampo and his successors had only temporarily held in check the rivalries between the clans, which could now be expressed freely once again. In a return to the old ways, each clan leader set himself up as a local warlord ensconced in his castle.

The final death knell for the cult of the tsenpos sounded when four nobles got together to plunder the royal tombs. Each chose a different tomb and opened the sealed sacred gates. They removed the precious gold and jewelled wealth of the tombs; some even stayed to make these formidable barrows their personal strongholds. The royal cult was effectively finished. It did not take long before the Buddhist temples were pillaged as well, and the last remaining monks turned out to roam the land. This, rather than the acts of Darma and his cohorts, represented the *coup de grâce* for monastic Buddhism in Central Tibet.

The country was plunging into a dark age, and nobody had the power, or will, to stop the kingdom tearing itself to pieces. The clan leaders might have enjoyed their return to power, but the power they wielded was fragmented and unstable. The empire had crumbled away while they indulged in their petty feuds. Greater Tibet was no more, and the country would never be the same again. No Tibetan army would ever threaten a distant kingdom again. In fact, after the end of the empire, there would never be a serious Tibetan army again, and any leader aiming to wield power over significant parts of the country would have to rely on foreign military backing.

Now the last few monks who decided to keep their robes headed out of Central Tibet. Tibetan history remembers a few of these refugees, Buddhist heroes who chose the hard way of keeping the faith, taking little more than their essential books with them, packed onto the backs of mules. A group of three friends, Yo, Mar and Tsang, headed west after watching more and more of their fellow monks wearing ordinary clothes, and getting involved in unmonkish activities such as hunting. After months of wandering, the refugees arrived in the green pasturelands and wooded hills of Amdo. Here they found a haven from the maelstrom of Central Tibet, a place where many temples built by Ralpachen still stood, their golden roofs glittering in the sun. These temples ranged from the exquisite turquoise-tiled monasteries of Tsongkha to the rocky mountain retreat of Dentig. Exploring these buildings, the refugees found that other monks had settled there too.¹⁴ These monks had found that the local rulers were quite willing to support them. Amdo was, after all, on the Silk Route, where Buddhism had been practised for many centuries before it was taken up by the Tibetan tsenpos.

And while the Chinese 'Return to Allegiance' army might have taken over most of Gansu, towns such as Liangzhou and Tsongkha were home to thousands of people who were essentially Tibetan. Some of these were Tibetan

soldiers who had stayed at their posts, and were unwilling to return without orders. Others were from different ethnic backgrounds such as the Azha, who had been under Tibetan rule so long that they were culturally very similar. Many local Chinese had also lived under Tibetan rule, and spoke and wrote the Tibetan language too. In fact, Tibetan had become a *lingua franca*, the common language of this multicultural region, used by Chinese, Turks and even the distant Khotanese. All of this meant that Tibetan Buddhists could find the support they needed to survive these dark times. Here the refugees made their home, keeping the flame of monastic ordination burning, a flame that would one day be brought back to ignite a Buddhist renaissance in Tibet.

EMBERS IN THE EAST

Though their achievements were heroic, the refugee monks were now old and perhaps felt that their work was done. The job of not just preserving but spreading the Buddhist ordination lineage would have to be taken up by somebody else, preferably someone young and energetic. So it was fortuitous that, just at this time, a local boy trained in the magical techniques of Tibet's pre-Buddhist religion began to spend time with the three refugees, from whom he learned about Buddhism.¹⁵

As the boy's interest grew, he studied philosophical texts with the monks, and one day was rewarded with a vision of the bodhisattva of compassion. Filled with the spirit of the bodhisattva ideal – to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment – the boy went to the monks and asked to be ordained. The three refugees agreed, and soon found two Chinese monks to make up the requisite number of five monks needed to ordain a novice. The boy was given the Buddhist name of Gewasel, 'Light of Virtue'. In his new robes he travelled in search of more of the Buddha's teachings. Many miles to the north, in an area controlled at that time by the Turks, Gewasel received all of the books of the Vinaya, the complete written regulations for Buddhist monks. Fired up with enthusiasm, he set off again, intending this time to make the great journey to Central Tibet. But he had got no further than Kham when he was told that there had been a great famine in Central Tibet, and was advised not to try to teach there.¹⁶

Downhearted, Gewasel returned to Amdo, and decided to spend some time in solitude in the mountain retreat of Dentig, which is still to be found deep in

a secluded valley. But it was not his fate to be a hermit. Locals who had heard of his extensive studies and travels came to Dentig to meet the famous monk, and gradually Gewasel developed a following. In time, some of his disciples were themselves ordained as Buddhist monks, and thus the lineage of the refugee monks came to be firmly established in Amdo. Using the wealth that a Buddhist teacher inevitably accrues when he becomes famous, Gewasel built temples and stupas in the green hills of Amdo.¹⁷

Many of Gewasel's disciples were finding that being a monk placed you among the most influential people in the splintered society that was now Tibet. This inevitably meant that monks were drawn into politics, while those hungry for political power, like the leaders of the old clans, were drawn towards Buddhism. These monks came to the notice of the new Song dynasty that was uniting China at the end of the tenth century. Monks who travelled to the Song capital were given the mark of imperial honour, purple robes, for their assistance in controlling the tumultuous Tibetan tribes of Amdo. Thus began a custom that was to have far-reaching consequences for Tibetan history, reverberating all the way down the centuries to the present day: Tibetan Buddhist monks with some political clout entering into a relationship with a much stronger neighbouring power, and gaining the support of that power in the name of a religious relationship. At times the religious relationship might have been real enough, but it was politics that brought it into being in the first place.¹⁸

The thriving monastic culture and high-profile Buddhist monks of Amdo caught the attention and imagination of some of the petty kings of Central Tibet, who had retained their royal ancestors' commitment to Buddhism, if in a rather eccentric form. After the last of the monks had either fled Central Tibet or hung up their robes for good, a strange hybrid religious scene had sprung up around the old temples. As the years passed and the memories of Buddhism faded, the temples with their statues and paintings retained a residual mystique. The meaning of the Buddhist paintings in the Jokhang and other temples was forgotten, and storytellers used them as the basis for their own invented fables. The venerable Buddha statues made of sandalwood and gold were popularly known as 'The Red Bald One' and 'The Gold Big-Headed One'.

These statues became the centre of a cult of pseudo-Buddhist priests, who wore costumes and hairstyles based on those of the old statues. For those who knew a bit more about Buddhism, the lofty ambitions of Tibet's Buddhist emperors seemed to be in ruins or, worse, descending into farce. Two

aristocratic cousins, descendants of one of the royal lines that split the imperial succession, decided that it was time to reverse the decline of monastic Buddhism in Central Tibet and bring back the Buddhist monks.¹⁹ They gathered a group of young men and sent them to Amdo to find a lineage of genuine monks to kick-start monastic Buddhism.

When this fellowship of monks-to-be arrived in Amdo, they heard that the most respected monastic lineage was that of Gewasel. After they had found him and been accepted as students, they began to study Buddhist texts and follow the ethical precepts of the Vinaya. After a few years Gewasel declared them ready to return home, and the fellowship, wearing their monks' robes as a sign of their firm grasp of Buddhist principles, headed back to Central Tibet. They were each assigned responsibilities for different aspects of the difficult task of transplanting monastic Buddhism back into the much-raked-over soil of Central Tibet. When they arrived, they were met by the two noblemen who had sent them on their journey, and handed the keys to the great edifice of imperial Buddhism, the monastic complex of Samye.²⁰

A dispiriting sight awaited the monks as they swung back the gate. The broad paths that circled the main temples were choked with brambles and fallen plaster. Inside the main temple the paintings had been ruined by water that had come in through the windows, and birds had built nests on the statues' heads. Declaring 'This place is a swamp!', the fellowship left by the main gate and locked it behind them again. Overwhelmed by the daunting task of restoring Samye, the individual monks decided to go their own ways and set up communities in smaller temples that needed less work. Thus the fellowship came to an end, but Buddhist monks were back in Central Tibet: this time for good.²¹

THE WIND FROM THE WEST

At the same time another religious revival was getting under way in Tibet's west, in the high and barren landscape that had once been home to the ancient kingdom of Zhangzhung. It began with the birth of an unusual child in the year 958. When he was just two, his parents noticed him tracing Sanskrit syllables in the dirt or just sitting quietly with his palms together. Like Gewasel, he was born into a family of non-Buddhist ritualists, but it was Buddhism that drew him. When he turned thirteen he took the Buddhist vows and was given the religious name Rinchen Zangpo. He started to study straight away, but it

was only when he caught sight of a beautiful Indian book from what is now northern Pakistan a few years later that he began to think of travelling to India.²²

Though still only a teenager, Rinchen Zangpo convinced his parents of the sincerity of his desire to study Buddhism in India, and they agreed to let him go provided he took a travelling companion. So he and a friend set out in old clothes, carrying money, presents and bundles of food cooked by Rinchen Zangpo's mother. In the early days of the journey through Kashmir the two young travellers were swindled by unscrupulous toll-keepers, laid low by illness, narrowly avoided being robbed, and were both impressed and confused by the religious devotion of ordinary people and the puzzling behaviour of naked holy men.

One day they came to a town, where, as usual, children ran after them, shouting about their light skins and strange clothes. Going to beg for alms in the town centre, they met an old Brahmin who took Rinchen Zangpo's outstretched hand and looked at his palm. The Brahmin then went back inside his house and offered Rinchen Zangpo a silver incense bowl with a bunch of flowers inside and, taking hold of his robe, prophesied for him a life of learning, of great benefit to living beings, and ultimately the achievement of enlightenment. The old Brahmin, whose name was Shraddhakaravarman, became Rinchen Zangpo's first guru. With him, Rinchen Zangpo began to study the philosophical and ritual texts of tantric Buddhism in the original Sanskrit. After a few years of this he decided to return home, but a series of dreams convinced him instead to visit the famous teacher Naropa and then travel to eastern India, where he studied and translated non-tantric works. When he finally turned back towards Tibet, thirteen years had passed.

Back home, Rinchen Zangpo found to his great sadness that his father had died. He berated himself for remaining so long in India, and tried to make up for his absence by commissioning a series of paintings of a special mandala for liberating the dead from unhappy rebirths. Then he discovered that, while he had been away in India, a charismatic teacher calling himself the 'Buddha Star King' had gathered a devoted following in Western Tibet, displaying magical powers such as levitation and styling himself as a kind of modern buddha. Rinchen Zangpo determined to expose this teacher as a fake. He spent a month deep in meditation, and then went to where the Star King was teaching while levitating above the ground, as was his wont. Rinchen Zangpo went up to the Star King and pointed a finger at him, at which the Star King spun head

over heels and dropped to the ground. Humiliated and clearly bested, the Star King skulked away, never to be seen again in Western Tibet.

News of this magical duel reached the royal court in Western Tibet where the king, Yeshe O, had declared that Buddhism would be followed in his realm, and was determined that it should be practised properly. The king wrote an open letter complaining about Tibetan misunderstandings and deliberate misrepresentations of the Buddhist tantras. These tantras had begun to appear in India in the fifth century AD. In them, the goal of Mahayana Buddhism – enlightenment for all living beings – remained the same, but new methods for reaching that goal more swiftly were introduced. The most controversial of these new approaches was the complete reversal of accepted norms based on the realisation of emptiness – that nothing exists in and of itself. So the Buddhist precepts of not killing, stealing or engaging in sexual misconduct were turned into injunctions to carry out these activities. Those Buddhists who accepted the validity of the tantras argued that this was a way of transcending ordinary dualistic thinking, and not to be taken literally. Others felt that the tantras might be used to justify all kinds of transgressive behaviour.

Even worse, Yeshe O suspected that the Tibetans had composed their own tantras to justify their licentious behaviour. ‘False mantras’, he warned in his edict, ‘have spread throughout Tibet.’ As far as he was concerned, evidence of the degeneration of Buddhism was clear enough. People were sacrificing animals and even humans in the name of tantra, and having indiscriminate sex with people of different classes. Such destabilising practices could hardly be countenanced by any ruler, let alone a Buddhist one. The king was not just concerned with the moral problems raised by these tantric practices, but by the damage they caused to the underlying structure of Tibetan society.²³

In truth, much of what Yeshe O saw as degenerate Tibetan innovation was also to be found in the Indian Buddhist tantras. Deliberately shocking imagery of sex and violence (known as ‘union’ and ‘liberation’) permeates the tantras of Mahayoga and their associated practices, which had become particularly popular in Tibet during the tenth century. Tantric Buddhism, and Mahayoga in particular, had been kept out of the public eye by the Tibetan tsenpos, who no doubt also feared the destabilising power of its shocking imagery. After the fall of the empire, tantric practices spread everywhere.²⁴ The wild popularity of the tantras alarmed other serious-minded Buddhists, who wrote elegantly sarcastic poems about the abuses of tantric Buddhism.

One of these poems complains that tantric Buddhism is so popular that ‘everyone born human wants to practise it’. It goes on to bemoan the breakdown of the hierarchy of teacher and student, now that all reckon themselves tantric masters:

For every hundred students there are a thousand teachers,
And nobody listens to the divine dharma.
For every village there are ten masters,
And the number of tantric assistants in uncountable.²⁵

The ‘dharma’ is the teachings of the Buddha and the authorised commentaries upon them. The anxiety expressed here is that they are about to be overwhelmed by the new tantric movement. Another poem criticises the ‘self-appointed buddhas’ popping up all over Tibet. It seems the popularity of the tantras had outstripped the number of people qualified to teach them. And qualifications were needed, for the deliberately shocking language of the tantras should not be taken literally; it needed interpretation. This is the role of the guru, a representative of a lineage of authorised commentators able to put the confusing imagery of the tantras into its proper context.

This context includes initiations, only given to those ready for tantric practices, and solemn vows curbing any tendency to take the violent and sexual imagery of the tantras literally. As for meditation, the practitioner identifies with a Buddhist deity as a representation of the enlightened qualities of his or her own mind. This identification, through visualisation and the recitation of mantras, is thought to transform the mind far more quickly than the conventional practices of study and meditation alone. However, such tantric practices remain rooted in Buddhist philosophical enquiries and moral aspirations. This, again, is often emphasised in the guru’s oral lineage, but can be conveniently ignored by those who practise without a guru.

Such misunderstandings had convinced Yeshe O of the need to bring the most up-to-date Buddhist works to Tibet. It seemed that the powerful and learned young Tibetan who had defeated the Star King might be just the man to lead this project. Rinchen Zangpo was thus offered the position of court preceptor, with responsibility for teaching tantric Buddhism and advising Yeshe O on his temple-building projects. He accepted and was soon joined by a number of Indian masters, working with them to make new translations from the Sanskrit, drawing inspiration from the translator teams of the old

Tibetan empire. At the same time, Yeshe O built a great temple at Toling, which he made his home, spending more and more time in religious practice and leaving the running of the kingdom to his nephew. Temple-building, translating, inviting Indian masters and ordaining Tibetan monks: this was precisely what the great Tibetan tsenpos had done two hundred years earlier, and the imitation was intentional. For in Buddhism the kings of Western Tibet, like the tsenpos before them, saw a way to bring the rule of law to their kingdom, securing their own kingly role and encouraging their subjects to be virtuous and law-abiding members of a new society.²⁶

There was still much for Rinchen Zangpo to do. All the new temples under construction needed to be decorated with suitable Buddhist murals. Rinchen Zangpo was thus sent to Kashmir to find artists willing to come and work in Tibet. He left Tibet in very different circumstances from his first youthful journey, wealthy, well equipped and surrounded by attendants. Not content to stay in Kashmir, he led his Tibetan party deep into Central India in search of new texts. After six long years of travelling, Rinchen Zangpo returned with over thirty Indian artists. Over the following decades they would work inside the temples of Western Tibet to create masterpieces of Buddhist art, a few of which can still be seen today. Rinchen Zangpo also continued to study and master tantric practices on this journey, and brought back the rituals for fierce deities sworn to protect Buddhism, such as Mahakala, 'The Great Black One'.²⁷

So it was that Rinchen Zangpo, known to posterity as the Great Translator, blazed the trail for a new influx of Buddhist teachings into Tibet. Yeshe O's suspicions of tantric practices had not in the end led to a suppression of tantric Buddhism, but rather to its reinvigoration, with new tantric lineages arriving from Kashmir and India. The differences between these 'new' (*sarma*) tantras and the 'old' (*nyingma*) tantras that had been translated in the earlier period set the stage for the emergence of many new schools of Tibetan Buddhism over the coming years. But already, at the dawn of the eleventh century, the beginning of the second millennium, it was clear that a new and vital centre of Buddhism had emerged, one that was already spawning fresh achievements in art, architecture and translation.

THE AMBASSADOR FROM INDIA

Thirty years after he had declared Buddhism the kingdom's religion, and fused its moral code with the ancient ways of the Tibetan kings, Yeshe O was an old

monk who spent much of his time in meditation, but could sometimes be seen circumambulating his residence at the Toling temple. His personal example, and the success of his project, inspired his descendants. His nephew, now the king, worked closely with Rinchen Zangpo and the Indian teachers who came to help translate new Buddhist texts. His daughter had a nunnery built, and provided the funding to support a community of nuns there.²⁸

But the achievement for which the kings of Western Tibet are best remembered belongs to the next generation, in the late tenth century. The eldest prince of this new generation was a strong and short-tempered character who was more interested in battle than religion. Though he founded one temple and practised a little tantric Buddhism, he mainly waged war to protect the kingdom. On a campaign against the Turks he was captured and a ransom of gold was demanded, equal in weight to his entire body. His brother took on the task of gathering this gold. He travelled to Central Tibet, where a major new gold mine had recently been opened, but by the time he had collected a sufficient amount, his sibling was dead, having escaped captivity only to succumb to poisoning on the journey home.²⁹

The younger prince, who had now taken religious vows and been given the Buddhist name of Jangchup O, 'Light of Enlightenment', had an idea. Why not use all of this gold to invite a respected and prestigious Buddhist master from India? In the great Indian monastic university of Vikramashila there was a teacher called Dipamkarashrijnana, also known as Atisha, who was famed for his philosophical acuity, mastery of tantric practices, and personal qualities of humility and compassion.³⁰ A Tibetan party travelled to Vikramashila and set to work persuading Atisha to accept their invitation. It didn't take long. Atisha knew some Tibetans who had studied at Vikramashila, and was impressed by their diligence. He also received favourable signs in his dreams from Tara, the tantric deity to whom he was particularly devoted. However, when the Tibetans went to the abbot of Vikramashila to ask permission for Atisha to leave with them, he was less impressed, referring to Tibet as 'that yak pen of yours', and accusing the Tibetans of trying to steal his best scholar.³¹

In the end the abbot gave Atisha permission, providing he stayed in Tibet no longer than three years. Once the party had set out, it quickly became evident that the journey itself would take long enough. A famous teacher could not travel far without being asked by local rulers to stay a while and give instruction; the king of Nepal persuaded Atisha to stay in Kathmandu for a whole year. When the party finally arrived in Western Tibet in 1042, Prince

Jangchup O rode out for a day and a half to greet Atisha, a mark of the highest honour. Atisha was immediately impressed with the Buddhist devotion evident at court, and surprised to see how much translation work had already been done there with visiting Indian scholars. Talking to Jangchup O, he wondered aloud if he was really needed in Tibet. But Jangchup O assured Atisha that there was a great need for his learning. In particular, the Tibetan prince had not been able to get a definitive answer from any of the Indian scholars he had consulted on his questions about tantric practices. Rinchen Zangpo and those who followed him had ensured that there was now a plethora of tantras with genuine Indian heritage, yet these still contained violent and sexual imagery.

How did this imagery fit in with the ethical and philosophical principles of Buddhism? The Tibetan prince's question was one that had been discussed by generations of Buddhist scholar-meditators in the great universities of India, so Atisha was well placed to provide an answer. He wrote a brief poem called 'A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment', setting out the whole Buddhist path in graduated stages – the ritual of taking refuge, the motivation for bringing all beings to enlightenment, the meditative practice of calm abiding and the analytical practice of insight and, based on the non-conceptual wisdom arising from these, tantric meditation. This should be approached properly, through a relationship with a genuine guru who could give the empowerment that allowed one to practise tantric meditation.

Though they were elegant and concise, Jangchup O found Atisha's verses a little opaque, and asked him to write a prose commentary. Atisha agreed, and set out his opinion even more clearly. He wrote that while laypeople could receive every kind of empowerment, monks could only receive those that were not related to sexual practices. This, Atisha said, was based on the teachings of his own gurus, who had believed that the survival of Buddhism depended on the monks, and the monks were only monks as long as they remained celibate. But Atisha was equally insistent that nobody should criticise tantric Buddhism. Its practices were without doubt the most efficacious, and to belittle them was to belittle the word of the Buddha.

A popular story about Atisha's meeting with Rinchen Zangpo suggests that the Tibetans still had much to learn about tantric Buddhism. Rinchen Zangpo, who was born a quarter of a century before Atisha and was by this time a very old man, was visited by Atisha at his residence, a three-storey temple. Atisha treated Rinchen Zangpo with the greatest respect, and their conversation

lasted into the night. That night, Atisha noticed that Rinchen Zangpo practised meditation on each of the temple's three floors. When asked about this the next morning, Rinchen Zangpo explained that this was the way he practised meditation on the three main tantras: Guhyasamaja on the ground floor, Hevajra on the next, and Chakrasamvara on top. At this, Atisha's face darkened and he muttered, 'I did need to come after all.' When Rinchen Zangpo asked what he meant, he explained that, however many different kinds of tantric deity one cultivated, if one practised properly they were all the same. It would be quite sufficient to practise them all in one place.³²

Spending most of his time at the great Toling monastery, Atisha stayed three years in Western Tibet. After that, honouring his promise to the abbot of his monastery back in India, he set out on the return journey accompanied by a large group of his Tibetan students. When they reached the border of Nepal, they were told that there was fighting nearby and it would be unwise to travel further. While the party waited in their camp, an argument broke out between two of Atisha's Tibetan disciples. On the one side, Nagtso, who had led the party that had brought Atisha back to Tibet, wanted to honour the promise he had made to return after three years. On the other, Dromton, a Central Tibetan who had come to study with Atisha, thought that there was much more Atisha could achieve if he travelled to Central Tibet.

Eventually Atisha agreed to Dromton's request. It was a momentous decision, for though he may not have known it at the time, Atisha would never return to India. When the party arrived in Central Tibet, they encountered the thriving monasteries revived by the fellowship of monks who had travelled to Amdo in search of monastic ordination. Atisha now found himself in the role of a respected visiting lecturer, bringing prestige and large numbers of students to the monasteries he visited. His presence sometimes exacerbated tensions between the monasteries, as they competed with each other to host the famous Indian scholar. The heads of the monasteries were also the local clan leaders and, much as in Western Tibet, the distinctions between political and religious life were never clear-cut.

Still, Atisha made a great impression on the Buddhists of Central Tibet, and stories about his time there abound. These always emphasise his qualities of compassion and humility, and his insistence on practising the simplest of Buddhist devotional activities. He is said to have made many *tsatsa* – little clay images left as offerings at temples and stupas – some of which are held in reverence by temples today. He is also said to have been able to present

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Buddhism in a simple way to ordinary people, being especially fond of the simple injunction: 'Just be kind.' As mentioned above, Atisha never returned to his homeland. He passed away in 1054, having spent the last thirteen years of his life teaching Buddhism in Tibet. Though he was highly regarded, at the time Atisha was one among many Indian masters; even his longtime disciple Nagtso was away studying with another Indian at the time of Atisha's death. As had been the case with Padmasambhava before him, the full force of Atisha's influence on Tibetan Buddhism would not be felt until many years after he had passed away. Just as Padmasambhava was later known by the honorific term Guru Rinpoche, Atisha would be known to later generations of Tibetans as Jowoje, 'Noble Lord'.



4

Patrons and Priests, 1054–1315

FERMENT AND FERVOUR

As Atisha toured Tibet, the old Indian scholar must have been both heartened and concerned by what he saw. True, monasteries dotted the landscape, and monks' robes were now a common sight. But Tibetan society was in a state of turmoil: squabbles, skirmishes and outright wars were constantly breaking out between rival warlords. Merchants plied their trade, but always under threat of ambush by bandits. At the same time, lay Buddhist tantric teachers were springing up all over the place, some handing down traditions from the imperial period, others offering new translations only just brought back from India. It was a time of religious ferment, out of which Tibet's Buddhist orders were beginning to emerge.

Though it had only been half a century since the great task of restoring the monasteries had begun, the heads of the monasteries could hardly avoid getting embroiled in politics as they vied for patronage from the local nobility. The monks were not a unified force either, since each of the individual members of the fellowship who had brought the monastic ordination lineage back from Amdo had set up his own monastic community. Then there were the wild cards – tantric adepts well versed in rituals to protect or destroy. Despite their adherence to the same religion, the monks and tantric adepts were not above criticising each other's methods, and sometimes came into conflict, especially when competing for patronage.

All the same, the tide was turning in the monks' favour. The Tibetan nobles, even if they could not unite to create a coherent leadership, were beginning to

see Buddhism as a central part of Tibetan culture, in particular the culture of the ancient tsenpos, when Tibet was at its greatest. Thus every aristocrat who supported the monks was emulating the example of the greatest Tibetan emperor, Trisong Detsen. Perhaps most important of all was the monks' genuine dedication to the Buddha's teachings and to planting them firmly in Tibetan soil.

Atisha's disciple Dromton had been responsible for getting him to travel to Central Tibet, and had accompanied him throughout his ten years there. After the death of the great Indian teacher on Tibetan soil, Dromton decided to build a small monastery dedicated to Atisha's teachings. This was Radreng, built in the 1050s and, despite being devastated in the 1960s, still standing to the north of Lhasa today. Though Dromton himself was focused on creating a peaceful setting in which dedicated meditators could put Atisha's instructions into practice, some of his students were much more outward-looking, and determined to take Atisha's lineage to the Tibetan people. Like all good missionaries, they expressed the Buddha's teachings in simple terms, used the language of ordinary people and drew their examples from daily life.

These preachers became known as the Kadampas, the followers of the Buddha's scriptures (*ka* in Tibetan) and the advice (*dam* in Tibetan) of Atisha. Their missionary activities took them far from Central Tibet, with some Kadampas travelling to Amdo and beyond, carrying their pithy advice to the court of the Tanguts, the new power in Central Asia. At the heart of the Kadampa missionaries' teaching and practice was a technique known as 'mind training' (*lojong* in Tibetan). Derived from the methods brought from India by Atisha, this was based on simple instructions for replacing ordinary egoistical impulses with selfless compassion.

One of the most famous examples of mind training is the *Eight Verses of Langri Tangpa*, a series of aspirations for changing one's own selfish behaviour, including: 'Whenever I am with others, I will see myself as the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart respect them as the highest.' And: 'When others out of jealousy mistreat me with abuse and slander, I will accept the defeat for myself, and offer them the victory.' And: 'In short, I will offer my own happiness to my mothers both directly and indirectly, and secretly take all of their sufferings upon myself.' The reference to 'my mothers' here is a reminder of the belief that, in the infinite cycle of samsara, all living being must have, at some point, been one's mother. There was nothing new in these instructions, which were based on the Buddha's basic teachings of non-self: not only is there no self,

but it is due to our attachment to this illusory self that we experience mental afflictions such as desire, hatred, jealousy, pride and ignorance. The Kadampas emphasised again and again the paradoxical fact that selfishness does not make us happy, and taught that its opposite, selflessness, was the key to ensuring the happiness of both oneself and others.¹

Of course, it is not always easy to put such noble sentiments into practice, and even Atisha's own disciples could be petty and jealous in their relationships with each other, and in their attempts to curry favour with their master.² The Kadampas themselves pointed out that petty thoughts and actions were themselves the subject of teachings that Atisha had passed on to them. Their influence is nicely illustrated by popular stories about early Kadampa monks such as Geshe Ben Gungyal. According to one of these anecdotes, Geshe Ben was sitting in a large gathering of Buddhist teachers when, during a break in the proceedings, yoghurt was offered to the guests. Geshe Ben, sitting in the middle row, noticed how much yoghurt the guests in the first row were taking and wondered if he would get his fair share. Suddenly realising what he was thinking, he reprimanded himself ('You yoghurt-addict!') and turned his bowl upside down. When the yoghurt came round to him he refused, saying, 'My bad thoughts have already taken their share.'³

There was one specific meditation technique taught by the Kadampa monks that became very famous in Tibet: the method of 'sending and taking' (*tonglen* in Tibetan), invoked in the Eight Verses. In this method the meditator imagines taking on the suffering of sentient beings, and giving them happiness. For many Kadampas, sending and taking was the ultimate practice, the greatest antidote to selfishness, and for a while it was only taught in confidence, passed on from a single teacher to a single student. Later, even when it was taught more openly, the Kadampas revered the mind-training meditation above any other method, including the secret techniques of the tantras. When one Kadampa teacher was told of a tantric method called 'the ornament of pristine awareness', he replied, 'That is not my path; mine is the tradition of Radreng.'⁴

PRESERVING THE OLD WAYS

There is an old story that Darma, the emperor blamed for destroying monastic Buddhism in Tibet in the middle of the ninth century, summoned the most famous tantric adept to his court and challenged him to display his powers.

The adept replied, 'Behold my power, coming from the recitation of a mere mantra,' and pointed to the sky. Suspended above him, the emperor saw a black scorpion the size of a yak. Scared, he promised not to harm the adept. Still, the adept was not satisfied; pointing to a nearby mountain, he brought down a lightning bolt which split the rocks at its peak. Now completely terrified, the emperor promised not to harm any of Tibet's tantric adepts.⁵

This probably didn't happen, but the story offers a dramatic illustration of the fact that the Tibetans who practised Buddhism mainly in its tantric forms, and did not take the monks' ordination, were less affected by the collapse of monastic Buddhism when the Tibetan empire imploded. The tantric adepts, known as Ngagpas, 'Practitioners of Mantra', preserved the tantras and the practices drawn from them through the dark period. They also took on the role of village priests, dealing with the day-to-day needs of the local community, through divination, medical practice, and the placation of gods and spirits. When the monks returned to Central Tibet, the Ngagpas were still there. As the monks gained a foothold once again in the valleys of Tibet, the relationship between these two different types of Buddhist would often be an uneasy one.

The Ngagpas' teachings were usually passed down from father to son, keeping alive traditions that, they were proud to say, extended back to the time of the emperors. One of the greatest of these tantric families was the Zur clan. Zur the Elder was born at the very beginning of the eleventh century near Nangchen, in the eastern part of Tibet, where he learned from his father the tantras known as the Magical Net. He intended to take ordination in the Amdo monastic lineage, but later decided that the path of the tantras was a better way to enlightenment. Eager to learn more, he travelled to Central Tibet and studied there with a great many Ngagpas, including the hermits of the Chimpu caves near Samye monastery, which had become a favourite site for tantric retreats.⁶

After a few years Zur the Elder started to attract his own disciples, and so decided to found a temple at his favourite meditation spot, Ukpung, or 'Owl Valley'. Here he welcomed both those who wanted to study the scriptures and those who preferred to perform rituals. When the ritualists tried to ban the scholars from their sessions, Zur the Elder stepped in and reprimanded them, saying that every philosophical and meditative approach would eventually lead to the same goal, enlightenment. Zur's open-mindedness also became evident in his studies with Drogmi, a prolific translator of new tantras just arrived

from India. Despite Drogmi's lack of aristocratic heritage, Zur paid a great deal of gold for Drogmi's famously expensive instructions.

Other kinds of conflict arose in the always vexed area of patronage. Once Zur the Elder was invited by a wealthy family to preside over a religious assembly. Also on the guest list were a monk (representing the monastic ordination lineage brought from Amdo) and a Bonpo priest (representing a new formulation of Tibet's old religious practices). The three convinced their wealthy patron that this was a great opportunity to build a temple, but when they sat down to plan it, they could not agree on what the main statue would be. Zur wanted the tantric deity Vajrasattva, the monk wanted Shakyamuni Buddha, and the Bonpo wanted Shenrab Miwo, the founder of his own sect.

Zur then joined forces with the Bonpo, leaving the monk to build his temple on his own. This alone suggests how deep the divisions between the monks and the Ngagpas could run. But since Zur and the Bonpo failed to agree which of their statues should be placed in the higher position, they also went their separate ways. In the end, three temples were built, and the patrons, probably somewhat surprised by this outcome, gave each temple responsibility for protecting the fields from hail every third year. Protecting the fields from hail became one of the mainstays of the Ngagpas, and right through to the twentieth century most Tibetan farmers were still paying a 'hail prevention tax' to their local Ngagpa.⁷

As he approached old age, Zur the Elder began to cultivate his nephew, Zur the Younger, as his successor. Zur the Younger was not a monk: indeed, the elder Zur had advised him to marry a wealthy woman so that he would have enough money to receive teachings and copy books. Zur the Younger specialised in the practice of 'liberation', ritual killing in order to bring beings to enlightenment. This was considered a particularly advanced practice, and stories of those who practised it spread fast. Once, it is said, Zur the Elder and his disciples passed a lice-infested bitch with puppies. While Zur the Elder petted the animals, Zur the Younger killed them all and proceeded to pick the lice off the corpses and eat them. The other disciples were horrified, but the elder Zur explained that his nephew had achieved what he could not, protecting these dogs and their parasites from the bad rebirths that were otherwise to be their fate.

Thanks perhaps to the circulation of stories of this kind, Zur the Younger attracted a large number of students, and was more successful than his predecessor in teaching the Magical Net and its secret instructions. He also

converted four philosopher-monks sent by one of the foremost Tibetan specialists in logic. This made the famous logician so angry that he encouraged his students to kill Zur, saying that anyone who did so would attain enlightenment. When he heard this, Zur quipped that it seemed that even the philosopher-monks were now practising 'liberation'.

In truth, the Zurs already surrounded their ritual techniques with philosophy, albeit a philosophy grounded in meditative experience. This was the Great Perfection (*Dzogchen*). Arising out of the tantras of the Magical Net, but teaching a transcendence of any sort of meditation, Great Perfection instructions pointed to the mind of this present moment as ever-present enlightenment. These instructions were short and poetic, and had probably been passed down orally before being put into written form. One famous such instruction is the *Cuckoo of Awareness*:

The various appearances are non-dual by nature
Without even the slightest bit of elaboration.
The way of things is free from conceptualisation
But manifests in different forms: it's all good.
Since everything is done, give up the malady of seeking
And stay where you are without effort.⁸

These Great Perfection instructions were rarely taken literally: few Ngagpas, if any, gave up every kind of religious practice just to sit around being enlightened. Instead, the Great Perfection remained a kind of framework for meditation and study, a reminder that enlightenment was not to be found 'out there' but was immediately present in the pure nature of one's own mind.

The rituals and meditative instructions of the Zurs were powerful, but they were living in an increasingly competitive time. People began calling Tibetan aristocratic lineages such as the Zurs *Nyingma*, 'The Old Ones'. Zur the Younger had a son in the last years of his life who would be very successful in spreading the lineage's teachings, but other aristocratic clans were turning to the new tantras, and the balance of religious and political power in Tibet would soon be tipping in their direction. Many were the young Tibetans willing to risk the journey to India to bring back new tantric lineages. A few of them, without even intending to, would be the founders of new Buddhist schools, a handful of which would survive to define Tibetan Buddhism for centuries.

THE TRAVELS OF MARPA

As a child, Marpa Chokyi Lodro was such a troublemaker that his parents banned him from visiting the house of anybody except his teacher and a single friend.⁹ When he was fifteen Marpa's father decided to send him away to study Sanskrit with a famous translator, hoping that the experience might make a man of him. The translator was Drogmi, the famously expensive teacher who had also instructed Zur the Elder. While studying with Drogmi, Marpa noticed how much gold he was paid for giving the tantric empowerments and instructions that he had learned in India. As a result, he decided that what he really needed to do was to travel to India himself.

And so Marpa, securing fifteen ounces of gold and some travelling boots and a hat from a wealthy patron, set out for India. Whereas Rinchen Zangpo and the other translators from Western Tibet tended to travel through Kashmir, Central Tibetans such as Marpa usually went via Nepal. The Kathmandu valley was itself a thriving centre for tantric Buddhism, and some Tibetans never went any further. Marpa spent three years there, partly to study and partly to adjust to the heat and humidity before travelling on to India.

Though he met various eminent teachers in the Kathmandu valley, Marpa was keen to study with the famous master Naropa. Hence he travelled to Naropa's hermitage near the great monastic university of Nalanda in eastern India, and studied with the master there. When Marpa returned to Tibet, he increased his stores of gold by teaching. He offered the local nobles a ritual for protecting children, asking for ten ounces of gold for each performance. He was also fortunate to make friends with Goyak, a very rich man who was also from the Marpa clan. Goyak owned a gold mine that had recently been discovered, and was willing to pay Marpa handsomely for a tantric empowerment. Since Goyak encouraged other members of the clan to do the same, a large amount of gold came Marpa's way. Thus enriched, Marpa headed back to India for more teachings.

The frequent references in the biographies of this period to Tibetan gold mines suggests that Tibet was awash with gold in the eleventh century. As Indian tantric masters often asked for large offerings in return for their teachings, and gold was highly prized in India, Tibetan gold was vital to the economics of the resurgence of tantric Buddhism in the eleventh century. But the high cost of the tantric teachings was nothing new. A question-and-answer treatise on tantra from the ninth century addresses the concern that many

Tibetans clearly felt about paying for religion with the question: 'When the tantric master requests an offering at the time of empowerment, isn't this just something they have made up?' The answer is:

The enlightened path to liberation is an eternal treasure
 Found after having been lost on the road of samsara for uncountable aeons.
 It wouldn't be excessive to offer one's life ten million times, never mind
 anything less.
 The truth or falsity of this statement can be checked in any of the secret
 tantras.¹⁰

Back in India, Marpa travelled extensively and sat with many tantric masters, including some of the adepts known for their unorthodox behaviour, such as Kukkuripa, who lived like a dog. He also received more teachings from Naropa. When he finally returned to Tibet, Marpa was in his early forties, but before long he was off to India again for further teachings. Once, while travelling in Nepal, he was imprisoned by some corrupt border guards, an experience that led to a vision. While stewing in a hot prison cell with other Tibetans, hardly able to sleep at night, Marpa dreamed that two beautiful aristocratic Indian girls approached him with coy smiles. He followed them to the meditation retreat of Saraha, a great Indian adept of the teachings known as the Great Seal. In the vision Saraha gave Marpa direct instructions about meditation in the state of the Great Seal, urging him to be fearless like a lion, wander like an elephant and float like a bee. Marpa wrote down his dream in a poem based on an Indian song form known as the *doha*. He also translated dohas by Indian adepts such as Saraha. These songs spoke of the real nature of mind being ever present, and the futility of effort in meditation practice.¹¹

The doha songs served as a reminder of the simplicity of the 'ordinary mind' to those practising the sophisticated and complicated meditation practices of tantric Buddhism. By the time Marpa was in India, the higher levels of tantric practice were divided into two types: development and perfection. The stage of development involved the visualisation of oneself as a deity and the recitation of that deity's mantra, while the stage of perfection involved the manipulation of the body's internal energies. Marpa brought many practices of the perfection stage back to Tibet. One that became particularly popular was *tummo*, a meditation resulting in the generation of heat in the body.

When Marpa finally settled down in Tibet, he became a landowner in his local region of Lhodrag, got married and fathered several children. By now he was a middle-aged man, depicted in later paintings and sculptures as stocky and heavy-set. As a landowner, he was not only responsible for managing the peasants who worked his land, but also had to protect the boundaries of his territory from the encroachments of his neighbours. Thanks to the turbulent nature of life in Tibet at this time, and Marpa's own famously hot temper, he often got involved in disputes. Sometimes these were resolved through the destructive powers of tantric practice. Though tantric Buddhism was directed to the goal of enlightenment for all living beings (known as the supreme accomplishment), incidental magical powers (known as ordinary accomplishments) could also be cultivated. Many landowners of the time were quite willing to employ the services of those skilled in the ordinary accomplishments to protect their lands and lineage by cursing, and sometimes killing, their rivals.

Like most lay Buddhist teachers of his generation, Marpa hoped to pass on his lineage to his sons. Unfortunately, most of his children took no interest. Only one son, Dode, was willing to shoulder the responsibility. But Dode, hot-tempered like his father, got into a dispute with another famous translator-adept, Ra Lotsawa. When Dode suddenly died after being thrown from his horse, some suspected that Ra Lotsawa had cursed him. It seemed that Marpa's hope of establishing a family lineage was not to be fulfilled. However, he had attracted many students. Among them, one was to become especially famous as one of Tibet's best-loved exemplars of religious devotion: the yogin Milarepa.¹²

THE SONGS OF MILAREPA

Milarepa's story is one of the great religious biographies from Tibet, if not the world. Passed down orally for generations, it can hardly be accurate in the strict historical sense, but Milarepa's importance is both as a culture hero and as an ideal of religious practice to be aspired towards by Tibetan Buddhists. Milarepa whose original name was Topa Ga, 'Joyous to Hear', was born in 1040 to an old family of the Tibetan aristocracy, and his early life was relatively sheltered. In a famous biography of Milarepa, composed in the fifteenth century, his father explains the extent of his wealth, which would have been akin to that of many small landowners of the time: 'In the upper reaches of the valley are my animals: yaks, horses, and sheep; in the lower part are my fields, foremost

among them the Fertile Triangle, the envy of the poor. In the lower part of the house are cows, goats and donkeys; in the upper part are gold, silver, copper and iron implements, turquoise, silk textiles and a granary. In short there is no need for me to envy other wealthy men.¹³

Unfortunately for Milarepa, his father died when he was still a child. The extended family wanted his mother to remarry immediately, to one of her husband's nephews. Though this was a common practice in Tibet, Milarepa's mother refused, and the family cast her out. Milarepa's mother was proud and angry at her relatives, and so, when her son came of age, she sent him away to study destructive magic. Milarepa found a teacher and studied with five other students. Frustrated that this teacher's spells were not destructive enough, he found another who was willing to teach him the art of summoning hailstorms. In an underground cell Milarepa practised for a fortnight. When he emerged, he found that a great storm had crushed the house of his extended family just as a wedding ceremony was taking place, killing over thirty people.

Milarepa was racked with guilt, but his mother sent him a letter insisting that he produce another hailstorm to destroy the family's crops too. Milarepa performed the rituals for another month and then travelled back home to bury hail-attracting diagrams in the fields. He wept as he concealed them, and that night the magic worked, destroying the fields and finally satisfying his mother. A tormented Milarepa now left home again in search of true religion to expiate his sins. First he was recommended to a teacher of the Great Perfection, but this teacher's instructions to remain without effort and let the true nature of his mind manifest failed, owing to Milarepa's turbulent mental state.

Milarepa now went in search of a teacher offering tantric empowerments from India, and thus it was that he met Marpa. Milarepa was accepted as a disciple by Marpa, but although several other students were receiving empowerments, Marpa refused to grant any teachings to Milarepa. Instead, he got Milarepa to do manual labour for him. The main task he set him was to build a tower, but each time Milarepa began to make progress, Marpa changed his mind about its location and told Milarepa to start again elsewhere. The final location was at a strategic pass where Marpa and his neighbours had taken an oath not to build fortifications. Having previously seen Milarepa build and demolish several other towers, his neighbours failed to take the threat seriously until it was too late. Once the tower was complete, Marpa had a strategic advantage over the neighbouring landowners.¹⁴

Whenever Milarepa felt that he had suffered enough and asked Marpa for empowerment, Marpa flew into a rage, sometimes slapping and punching him. Yet still Milarepa persevered in carrying out Marpa's commands in the hope of some day receiving his teachings and discovering the path to enlightenment. Milarepa's determination is an example for Tibetans of the total devotion that is required in tantric Buddhism. The power of tantric empowerment is dependent on disciples seeing the guru as a buddha; only then can they practise in order to realise their own buddha-nature. The tantras teach that there is no inherent difference between buddhas and ordinary people – only that the latter fail to realise their own buddhahood due to the grasping nature of the self. Milarepa's trials are a poetic evocation of the willingness to stop clinging to the self through devotion to the guru. Marpa's apparent cruelty is seen, in turn, as a skilful way of allowing Milarepa to overcome the immense negative karma that he had accumulated as a result of his earlier murderous rituals.

Eventually, Milarepa had had enough. With the support of Marpa's wife, who felt sorry for him, he left to train with one of Marpa's students instead. But he had no success in his meditation and eventually returned to Marpa, who, though angry at first, relented and agreed to teach him, accepting that he had made amends for his past misdeeds. Milarepa at last received the empowerments for which he had worked so hard. In order to practise without distraction, he went to live in a cave and meditated assiduously. This is the image of Milarepa that is best known in Tibet, as an emaciated hermit, his skin green from subsisting only on nettle soup. It was owing to his habit of wearing a cotton robe even in the depths of the Tibetan winter that he became known as Milarepa or 'Mila the Cotton Clad'.

Though, viewed from the outside, Milarepa's life as a hermit was terribly spartan, his inner experiences are joyously related in the many songs attributed to him:

This is a delightful place of hills and forests.
 In the mountain meadows the flowers bloom.
 In the woods dance the swaying trees.
 For monkeys it is a playground.
 Birds sing tunefully,
 Bees fly and buzz.
 From day till night rainbows come and go,
 In summer and winter the sweet rain falls,

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In spring and autumn the mist and fog rolls.
In solitude in this pleasant place
I, Milarepa, happily stay,
Meditating on the empty and luminous mind.¹⁵

Milarepa's songs merge the poetic manner of the Indian dohas brought to Tibet by Marpa with the direct and dramatic forms of old Tibetan verse. Whereas in the imperial period Tibetan poetry had celebrated military victories, Milarepa's songs celebrated his victories over self-clinging and the negative states of mind that it engenders. They remain the best, and best-loved, examples of Tibetan religious poetry.¹⁶

Though he made no effort to acquire followers, as Milarepa's reputation grew people began to gather around him. One of them was Rechungpa ('Little Repa'), who had travelled to India to find a cure for his leprosy before then spending the rest of his life attending on Milarepa. He is credited with preserving and passing on Milarepa's life story and songs. Another student was Gampopa, a doctor from Dagpo who turned monk when he proved unable to save his wife from an illness. Though he was a follower of the Kadampa tradition and would not renounce his robes, he became a great exponent of Marpa's teachings as passed down through Milarepa. Through Gampopa's work, the teachings of Marpa and Milarepa began to take the form of a school, the Kagyu. Yet even while the seeds of the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions were being planted in Tibet, another school came into being that would, for a while, attain not only religious dominance, but political rule over all Tibet: Sakya.¹⁷

THE FOUNDING OF SAKYA

Today Sakya is the only remaining school of Tibetan Buddhism whose leaders are drawn from a single aristocratic clan. They are the Khon and, like most ancient Tibetan clans, they trace their lineage beyond the world of humans to the gods themselves. The word *khon* means 'dispute'. The name is explained by the story that the first Khon was born after his father defeated a vampire called Kyareng the Bloodless and married the vampire's wife. A later Buddhist interpretation is that the name referred to the dispute with the enemy of ignorance. The Khon proudly recall that one of their forebears served as a minister at the Tibetan imperial court. Through marriage into the imperial family, they soon moved up in the world, becoming one of the only clans to survive the dark age.

Like the Zurs, they passed down from father to son tantric practices that had been translated into Tibetan in the imperial period.

Things changed with Khon Konchog Gyalpo, a contemporary of Milarepa, born in 1034. One day he witnessed a disheartening sight – tantric songs being performed as street theatre in a marketplace, in the midst of the day-to-day activities of buying, selling and horseracing. Konchog Gyalpo believed that the tantric teachings would only be effective if kept secret. Seeking a tantric lineage uncorrupted by public shows, Konchog Gyalpo turned to the premier translator of Indian tantras, Drogmi (whom we met earlier as a teacher of both Marpa and Zur the Elder). With Drogmi, he studied the Hevajra tantra before moving on to study with other well-known translators of the period. Still Konchog Gyalpo did not abandon his family's ancient religious tradition. He kept the wrathful meditation practices of Vajrakilaya and Heruka (also a major part of the Zur lineage), a decision that means Sakya remains the only 'new' school to have passed down tantric teachings from the imperial period in an unbroken line.

In later life, Konchog Gyalpo decided to build a retreat centre at Sakya, a valley in Southern Tibet. Even a small project like this required some diplomatic work. First he obtained permission from the local lord, and then negotiated with the village priests known as *bande*. He secured their support by offering a series of gifts: a white mare, curtains and ladies' gowns, a jewel rosary and a suit of armour. Thus began the association of the Khon family with Sakya, which was to last until they fled from the Communists in the mid-twentieth century. Konchog Gyalpo's retreat was to grow into a vast monastic centre, giving his religious lineage the name by which it became famous.

Konchog Gyalpo did not produce a son until he was fifty-eight years old, and when he did, the mother was not his wife but a young woman from a nearby village. Pragmatically, his wife agreed to bring the illegitimate heir into the family. The young Khon was given the best Buddhist education available and proved an intelligent student, as well as a diligent meditator. In time he would become known as Sachen, 'the great Sakyapa'. He often used to meditate in his father's temple, where he had visions of Buddhist deities. In one, the deity Manjushri came and gave him a brief instruction in four lines:

Dear child –

If you are attached to this life, you are not a Buddhist.

If you are attached to samsara, you do not have renunciation.

If you are attached to your own welfare, you do not have the awakening mind.

If fixation arises, you do not have the view.

The verses were taken by later Sakyapas as an explanation of the gradual process of 'letting go' required by the Buddhist path. The practice of this path is known as 'letting go of the four attachments' – to the things of this life, to better rebirths in future lives, to one's own welfare over that of others, and finally to any fixed concept of reality.

Any attachment Sachen might have had to his own extensive learning was challenged when, at the age of forty-seven, he fell mysteriously ill. The incapacitating illness, which some said was the result of his being poisoned by a zombie, left him in a state of complete amnesia. This was disastrous both for his personal religious practice and for his status as the head of an emerging religious lineage. Unable to study, Sachen meditated and, just as he had when he was a child, he experienced dreams and visions. Slowly his memory, and with it all of the teachings he had studied, returned.

Among the teachings studied by Sachen, one is held as supreme by the Sakyapas: *Lamdre*, 'The Path and its Result'. These secret instructions were first translated by Konchog Gyalpo's old teacher Drogmi. Since he had now passed away, Sachen had to go in search of one of Drogmi's students, Zhangton, a figure of such dubious reputation that Sachen's teacher warned Sachen to avoid him. But Sachen insisted – Zhangton was the only one who had the texts he needed. In the Buddhist tradition, many teachings were memorised and passed down orally. Even after most teachings were written down as texts, it was considered necessary to receive a ritual transmission (*lung* in Tibetan) in order to be able to study them. Without this, the teaching became a 'mere book', devoid of the living tradition of explanation and the transmission of realisation that accompanied the individual handing down of a text.

When Sachen did finally locate Zhangton, he saw only a dishevelled old man sitting in a field spinning thread and gossiping. Nobody knew that Zhangton was a meditator; locally he was only known as a farmer, a friendly but rather strange fellow who could often be seen collecting excrement from the roadside to fertilise his field. When Sachen asked him about *Lamdre*, Zhangton denied any knowledge of it, claiming only to know a bit about the Great Perfection. Only when he found out that Sachen's father was a disciple of his own teacher Drogmi did Zhangton relent and pass on his precious *Lamdre*

lineage. He insisted, however, that Sachen not write anything down for at least eighteen years.

Unlike his father, Sachen was blessed with several sons. Although one died on a trip to India, two others, Sonam Tsemo and Drakpa Gyaltsen, followed in their father's footsteps, gaining a broad religious education, sharing the leadership of Sakya and working towards a more stable form of Tibetan tantric Buddhism in their scholarly writings. A fourth son was more interested in studying medicine than religion, but he fathered a child who would not only take on the leadership of Sakya, but make the Sakyapas the first rulers of all Tibet since the time of the Tibetan empire.

LAMAS AND EMPERORS

The collapse of the Tibetan empire left a power vacuum in Eastern Central Asia in the tenth century. Small kingdoms run by Tibetans, Chinese and Turks fought among themselves, until, as the century drew to a close, a new power began to make itself felt in the region. The Tanguts were a people from the same ethnic background as the Tibetans, but unlike the Azha and the Sumpa, who had been subsumed by the Tibetan empire and by Tibetan culture, the Tanguts lived far enough to the north to have avoided this fate. After the eclipse of Tibetan power, they moved south to claim the old Tibetan dominions.

Once they had established a small empire on the Silk Route, the Tanguts lost no time in turning themselves into a literate and sophisticated culture. Just as the Tibetans had done some centuries earlier, they created a writing system from scratch, though theirs was based on a Chinese rather than an Indian model. Then they began the mammoth project of translating the entirety of Buddhist literature into their new written language, working with all the books they could obtain, whether in Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan. Alongside this project, which stretched over nearly two hundred years, the Tanguts translated Confucian classics, wrote down their own oral literature, and composed new works, such as a huge Tangut–Chinese dictionary.¹⁸

Since their empire included the northern reaches of the Tibetan cultural area, the Tanguts soon became familiar with the Tibetans. By the twelfth century, Tibetan lamas – the Tibetan term is a translation of the Sanskrit *guru*, but it came to be used for all high-ranking Buddhist monks – were becoming deeply involved with the Tangut court. Some were even honoured with the title of 'imperial preceptor'. But the Tanguts were not to enjoy lasting power. Their

empire, and the edifice of learning and culture that they had erected so quickly, were about to be swept away by the brute force of a much more powerful empire: that of the Mongols. In their hubris, the Tanguts refused to surrender to the Mongols. This only hastened their destruction, which came about when Genghis Khan himself led his army against the Tangut capital in 1225.

After a year of siege and violence, the Tangut capital Xingzhou was completely destroyed by the Mongol army. Genghis died in the midst of the campaign, but his tactics were apparent in the complete razing of the capital – a fate Genghis always threatened for those who would not surrender. In the end, the flower of Tangut civilisation had lasted for little more than two centuries. Yet this short-lived culture survived in two ways: first, through the manuscripts dug up from the sands of the Silk Route, one of the great finds of twentieth-century Russian exploration; and, second, through the Mongols' adoption of many of the Tanguts' best ideas, such as the patronage of Tibetan lamas.

After the death of Genghis, the vast empire that he had created was divided between his descendants in a series of messy, dispute-ridden successions reminiscent of those that had racked the Tibetan empire centuries earlier. The Tibetan borderlands of Amdo came under the rule of Goden, one of Genghis's grandsons. Though he wanted to do something about Tibet, Goden was not immediately sure what was possible. This vast and inhospitable land was split into dozens of petty kingdoms, apparently united only in their devotion to Buddhism. Now the example of the Tangut empire came into play. Goden wondered whether he could bring Tibet into the Mongolian empire through the same patronage of Buddhism that the Tanguts had practised in Amdo.¹⁹

To begin with, he sent a small Mongol army into Tibet headed by a general of Tangut descent. Despite the small size of the force, the Tibetans could muster no serious resistance as the army marched into Tibet in 1240. When the army finally reached the famous monastery of Radreng, it threatened to put the inhabitants to the sword. The abbot surrendered, and when he was asked who might represent the Tibetans at the Mongol court, he suggested Kunga Gyaltsen, the fourth Khon descendant to sit on the Sakya throne. Thanks to his deep understanding of the Sanskrit language and Indian culture, he was known by the respectful nickname Sakya Pandita. In his great knowledge of Indian Buddhism, Sakya Pandita had an eye for what he saw as Tibetan aberrations. Naturally conservative, he was suspicious of teachers who promised enlightenment without the need to pass through all of the stages of

Buddhist practice. Tibet's scholastic tradition – and Tibetan Buddhism is very much a scholastic tradition – owes much to Sakya Pandita, and his works are still on Tibetan monastic curricula today.

So the general took Sakya Pandita's name back to Goden. For a while Goden was distracted by other things, but a few years later in 1244 he decided that the time had come to summon a representative of the Tibetans to his court. Sakya Pandita was already in his sixties when the invitation arrived. It was not the sort that could be refused with impunity, so he had little alternative but to accept. Still, he travelled at a leisurely pace with his two young nephews, arriving at Goden's court in the summer of 1246. Sakya Pandita agreed in principle to act as the representative for Tibet. This involved little more than writing and signing a long letter, which was circulated among the local clan leaders of Tibet and which stated that they were all to accept Mongol rule unconditionally. From now on their authority would depend on their recognition by the Mongol ruler. Sakya officials would oversee the administration of the local clan holdings and assist in collecting taxes for the Mongols. Since resistance had now been shown to be useless, these demands were to be met at once. Seeing no alternative, the clan leaders accepted.

PATRON-PRIEST

Sakya Pandita never returned to Tibet, passing away in 1251 in the temple that Goden had built for him. With nobody on the scene to support Sakya interests, Tibet was carved up into administrative districts known as 'myriarchies', with each member of the Mongol royal family responsible for a different Buddhist clan. Goden could continue to patronise Sakya, but the school would have no special influence in Tibet. The present khan, Mongke, chose to patronise the Drigung, followers of Marpa's Kagyu lineage who had become so successful in Tibet that there was now a saying: 'all mountains are Drigung's mountains, all plains are Drigung's plains.'²⁰

After the death of Sakya Pandita, the two young nephews who had travelled from Tibet with him were left to fend for themselves at the court of a Mongol prince called Kubilai. Moving easily between Mongol and Tibetan cultures, Pagpa and Chagna counted Mongol princes as their friends and became acquainted with the famous Tibetan lamas who came to stay at Kubilai's court, such as the Karmapa and the leader of the Zur clan. And Kubilai was becoming increasingly interested in Buddhism. In 1258, he asked Pagpa for a major

tantric empowerment, which, as Kubilai knew, would establish Pagpa as his tantric guru, a serious relationship that allowed for no fallings-out.

In the same year Pagpa headed a major debate with the Daoists, who had been converting Buddhist monasteries and burning Buddhist books. When he won the debate, Pagpa celebrated his victory with a poem drawing upon Indian poetics, slyly using the Daoists' alchemical practices as a metaphor for their conversion to Buddhism:

The supreme teacher of the Daoists
 Following the one they call Lao Tzu
 Is well versed in the texts of his tradition,
 But became completely intoxicated
 By pride in his considerable fame,
 And looted and burned our books.
 Applying the elixir that transforms
 The iron of a sound intellect
 Into the golden teachings of genuine scripture,
 I transformed him into a holder of the vows
 Of the excellent yogic conduct of the Buddha.

After his success in the debate Pagpa's reputation soared, and it became clear that he was now a major player at the court of Kubilai. Then, the following year, Mongke suddenly died. What followed was effectively a civil war between different Mongol princes, destroying forever what remained of the unity wrought by Genghis. The fighting lasted four years, ending in 1264 with the Mongol empire divided between the Golden Horde in Russia, the Il-Khans in Persia, the Chaghatai khanate in Central Asia, and Kubilai's empire in the East. Realising that he needed to resolve the Tibet problem, Kubilai declared that the thirteen myriarchies of Tibet were henceforth to be ruled by Sakya, and gave Pagpa the title of 'state preceptor'. However, the Il-Khans in Persia refused to comply, and continued to support the Pagmodru and Drigung rulers in Western Tibet. This was to be a constant source of strife over the years to come.

While he was occupied in establishing a new capital near Beijing, Kubilai sent Pagpa back to Central Tibet with imperial documents asserting his authority, and a small army to back him up. Pagpa had not seen Sakya monastery since his childhood. Once he had settled in, he supplemented his political duties with religious work, writing Buddhist treatises and making

plans for building the Great Temple at Sakya on the one hand, while negotiating with the ever-troublesome Drigung, still supported by the Il-Khans of Persia, on the other. Pagpa hoped to bring Western Tibet under the wing of Sakya by persuading the Drigung to accept a small territory south of Lhasa instead. Unsurprisingly, the Drigung weren't keen, and the negotiations failed.²¹

After just two years in Tibet, Pagpa was summoned back to the Mongol court. If there was any sadness in his life of exile, it would have been made much worse by the sudden death of his younger brother Chagna, who had been his constant companion ever since they had travelled with their uncle to meet with the Mongols for the first time over twenty years before. As Pagpa travelled east, Kubilai's army was travelling in the other direction, to finish by force what Pagpa had been unable to do by negotiation. This invasion was directed by the 'chief administrator', the head of non-religious affairs at Sakya. He was in some ways the most powerful man in Tibet, even if in theory he had to answer to the abbot of Sakya monastery and the imperial preceptor at the Mongol court. Kubilai's army forced the Drigung to give up their Western Tibetan lands to Sakya. This high-handedness was an unforgiveable insult to the Drigung and the Il-Khans. The struggle for Tibet was by no means over.

Back at the new Mongol capital near present-day Beijing, Pagpa had much to keep him occupied. Shortly after his arrival Kubilai announced that Pagpa was to take responsibility for a very important project: creating a new writing system for his whole empire. Since Kubilai's empire now spanned China, Tibet and the old Inner Asian territories of the Mongols, no imperial order could be generally understood until it had been translated into several different languages. As an intelligent man who knew the different scripts of the Mongols, the Tibetans and the Chinese, Pagpa was ideal for the job. Throwing himself into this tremendous task, he developed an alphabet that took most of its forms from the Tibetan, but, like the Mongol and Chinese scripts, was written from top to bottom, rather than from left to right. Pagpa showed the completed script to Kubilai in 1269. The khan was very pleased, rewarding Pagpa with the rank of imperial preceptor. In effect, Pagpa was now the highest religious authority in the whole of Kubilai's empire, including China. Kubilai immediately made the new script compulsory for official documents and seals. In the end, the script, named after its creator, was only used until the fall of the Mongols, which was not far off.

Though Pagpa was held in high regard by Kubilai, he preferred to stay away from the hustle and bustle of court life. He therefore moved to northern Amdo, an area rich in Tibetan culture and Buddhist monasteries, but within reach of the Mongol capital. After a few years spent mainly in religious rather than political work, Pagpa returned to Kubilai's court, but only to ask the khan's permission to go back to Central Tibet: it may be that word had reached Pagpa that all was not well at Sakya monastery. Kubilai let Pagpa go, though he had to strip him of the rank of imperial preceptor, which could only be held by a monk at the court. In fact, Pagpa had already stretched this rule by living so far from the court.²²

On his journey home Pagpa encountered armed opposition from the Amdo Tibetans, and had to be escorted by the troops of three Mongol princes. When he arrived at Sakya monastery again in 1276, he found that the Western Tibet problem had not gone away. The Drigung and Pagmodru were still trying to lay claim to more territory; with military support from their Mongol allies in Persia, they represented a serious threat. Seeing how little had changed since he was last in Central Tibet, and how little difference Kubilai's military interventions had made, Pagpa decided to convene a major religious conference. After all, one thing the disputing Tibetan factions had in common was their devotion to Buddhism. Kubilai's son and heir, Prince Jingim, provided the funding for the conference. Pagpa thanked him by making him the dedicatee of *Illuminating the Objects of Knowledge*, a Buddhist textbook that, as well as being famous in Tibet, was translated into Chinese and Mongolian (and has now been translated into English too). As a gesture of non-sectarian good will, Pagpa nominated a Kadampa monk, the abbot of Nartang monastery, to chair the conference.

As a result of the success of the conference, peace reigned for a while in Tibet. A few years after this last great achievement, Pagpa passed away in Sakya monastery in December 1280. It was an untimely death, for Pagpa was only forty-five, but he had achieved much. Thrust into the limelight at a young age, he had shown maturity and a flair for diplomacy. He also approached his religious studies and practice with great seriousness, and this above all seems to have impressed Kubilai and others at court. Pagpa constantly negotiated between the interests of the Mongol court, those of his own Sakya monastery and those of the quarrelsome clan leaders of Tibet. These tensions were not over. No sooner had Pagpa been laid to rest than rumours started flying that he had been poisoned.

LIFE UNDER THE MONGOLS

The poisoning was blamed on the former chief administrator, who had been fired when Pagpa returned to Tibet in 1276. It is no surprise, then, that after Pagpa's sudden and unexpected death suspicion should have fallen on this man. It was well known that he had resorted to poisoning in order to bring Western Tibet under Sakya rule. When news of these suspicions reached Kubilai, he decided that only a strong intervention would end this insurrection at Sakya. Hence he sent an army of seven thousand soldiers which captured the former chief administrator and his cronies and put them to death.

But while there was now relative peace within the walls of Sakya, it was a different matter elsewhere. As Pagpa's nephew travelled to the Mongol capital to take up the role of imperial preceptor, the Drigung and their Mongol supporters were agitating once again. In 1285, they completely destroyed a Sakya monastery and killed the abbot; a few years later the situation degenerated into all-out civil war. By 1290, Kubilai was forced to act again. A combined army of Mongols and Tibetans marched on Western Tibet, killing thousands of western Mongols. It is said that Kubilai's troops cut off the ears of the dead troops and carried them in donkey carts. When the ears began to smell, they were placed in a stone enclosure on a dry and rocky plain. After a while they dried out and ceased to smell, and the place became known as 'The Stone Enclosure of the Ears'.

Equally gruesome was the fate meted out to the leader of the Drigung rebellion when he was finally captured, Drigung monastery having been burned down and most of its monks killed. The Drigung Gonpa (such was his title) was led to the law court at Sakya riding backwards on a horse, with a black sack tied over his head. The inevitable guilty verdict came, the sentence being the severe Mongol way of death. The Drigung Gonpa's throat was slit, his heart was taken out through his back, and both his head and heart were impaled on a victory banner. With that, the rule of Sakya and Kubilai over Tibet was at last unchallenged. Just to make sure of this, the army now marched eastwards towards Assam, and secured the country in that direction too.²³

So what was life like for Tibetans under Mongol rule? As we have seen, the Mongols had never been interested in fully incorporating Tibet into their empire. They preferred the strategy, used elsewhere for so-called 'border regions', of appointing local rulers who were loyal to the Mongols and could keep order in the country. As long as a ready supply of 'tribute' – essentially collected via a

punitive taxation system – was passed along to the Mongolian court, they were happy. Ordinary Tibetans were also burdened with an exploitative law that forced them to feed and house officials travelling between Sakya and the Mongol lands. These travelling parties could be massive, and they often stayed in a single location for weeks at a time, reducing their hosts to penury in the process.²⁴

It has become common practice in recent years for those who argue that Tibet is historically a part of China to point to the period of Mongol rule as the first instance of this. But, as we have seen, to characterise the situation of the late thirteenth century as representing the incorporation of Tibet into China would be a great oversimplification. For a start, Kubilai's eastern Mongol empire was never equivalent to China, though it included China as its greatest territory. For the benefit of their Chinese subjects, the Mongols ruled like the Chinese, adopting the Chinese reign name 'Yuan' and styling themselves as successors to the defeated Song dynasty. For this reason, Chinese historians treat the Mongols as merely another dynasty.

But the Mongol khans, even when they were at each other's throats, still considered themselves to be part of the great Mongol empire established by Genghis Khan. Proud to the last, they maintained a strict distinction between themselves and their subjects. People in the Mongol empire were classified according to three ethnic types: Mongols, Chinese and 'various races' including Persians, Russians, Turks and Tibetans. Not surprisingly, many Chinese resented Mongol rule, attempted several times to remove it, and saw the overthrow of the Mongols by the Ming dynasty in 1368 as a return to Chinese rule.²⁵

Nor did the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism at the Mongol court create any kind of cultural unity between China and Tibet. On the contrary, most Chinese regarded the impact of Tibetan Buddhism on the cultural and artistic life of China as deeply pernicious.²⁶ And the influences on Tibet were Mongolian, not Chinese. Tibet, unlike China, was never one of the administrative provinces of Kubilai's empire. It was a colony in which the Mongols ruled as Mongols, with the light touch that they preferred to adopt for their colonial territories. Most administrators in Tibet were Tibetan. Some were Mongols. None, as far as we know, was Chinese.

At the other extreme, traditional Tibetan historians and those who argue for Tibetan independence from China often characterise the relationship between the Mongols and the Tibetans as a purely religious one, based on the patron–priest relationship between Kubilai and Pagpa. It is said that Kubilai

offered Tibet to Pagpa as a symbolic fee for receiving tantric empowerment from him, and the Mongols then simply allowed the Sakya to run Tibet. This too is an oversimplification, for the Mongol court took a direct interest in how Tibet was run. At the Mongol capital there was a Department for Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs, and the imperial preceptor (Pagpa and his successors) was also resident at the court. They were at the top of the Tibetan administration, though their great distance from Central Tibet meant that they had little direct influence over the day-to-day affairs of Tibetan governance. In Tibet itself, the chief administrator of Sakya was the highest authority, though in religious matters he had to defer to the abbot of the monastery.

Another simplification made on both sides of the argument is the idea of a century or more of unchallenged rule over Tibet by the Sakya–Mongol alliance. As we have seen, the division of Tibet between different members of the Mongol royal family was a constant source of strife, and the alliance of the Tibetan houses of Drigung and Pagmodru with the Il-Khans meant that the Mongols were fighting over Tibet until the decisive final battles in 1290. After that, there was a period of relatively unified rule in Tibet, but already by the 1320s the head of the Pagmodru was causing trouble for Sakya. In the 1340s, this degenerated into civil war once again, and by 1353, as we will see in the next chapter, the Pagmodru had managed to overthrow the Sakya–Mongol alliance.

We have seen what the Mongols gained from Tibet. As in all of their dependencies, ‘tribute’ or taxation brought a sizeable income to the Mongol empire’s coffers. Tibet in addition offered a great deal of cultural capital to the Mongols in the form of Tibetan Buddhism, which, after Kubilai, became the main religion of the Mongol court. Along with the powerful methods of the tantras, Tibetan Buddhism provided the Mongols with the philosophical sophistication of Buddhist India, which Pagpa presented in clear and simple terms in his textbooks for the Mongol court. Pagpa, of course, also provided the Mongols with their own imperial script.

The contributions made by the Mongol empire to Tibet are not always obvious, mainly because so much of the Mongol administration would be systematically dismantled when Sakya rule was overthrown. One thing that was retained was the Mongols’ efficient taxation system. Another was the postal service, which acted as the nerve centre of the Mongol empire. The postal service ensured that the Mongol court in Beijing could keep in regular

contact with the Sakya rulers in Central Tibet and respond efficiently to emergencies such as invasions by the western Mongols. It worked by means of a system of relays, with a horseman riding from one relay point to the next, so being sure of food and lodging and the availability of a new horse if necessary at each point. The law that anyone travelling on official business could requisition horses and provisions – and its frequent abuse – survived down to the 1950s.²⁷

The other effect of Mongol rule in Tibet was to end the fragmentation of power, and to bring back the idea that some kind of central authority was achievable. The period of complete political fragmentation that had followed the collapse of the Tibetan imperial line was now over, never to return.²⁸ There had been a shift of power away from the clans and towards the Buddhist schools. Though this would not bring peace to Tibet, it would at least bring a degree of stability. Fundamental to this shift was the transfer of power made possible by the recognition of reborn lamas, placing the responsibility for succession in the hands of the Buddhist elite. The aristocracy would continue to rule Tibet, but from now on this would happen from within the Buddhist establishment. Yet the first Buddhist school to rule Tibet, the Sakya, would soon be brought down from within.



5

Golden Age, 1315–1543

NEMESIS

As the 1330s drew to a close, a troubleshooter rode through the gates of Sakya. The monastery had grown in recent years, spreading out from the tiny hermitage built by its founder in the eleventh century. Now it sprawled across the grey-brown hillside that had given it its name (*Sakya* = 'grey earth'), resembling a small town more than a monastery. Its wealth was on display in its gold roofs, glittering in the sun. Inside, the temples themselves were filled with precious statues donated by the Mongols, and Sakya boasted the greatest library in Tibet, its towering shelves stretching up several storeys in height.¹

The troubleshooter was the head of the Department of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs at the Mongol court, and he had left his office in Beijing to deal with an irksome young lord called Jangchub Gyaltsen. The latter was from the once-proud estate of the Pagmodru clan, allies of the Il-Khans of Persia, whose status had since fallen far. First, they had been forced, through coercion, poisoning and finally a terrifying invasion by Kubilai's troops, to give up their vast territory in Western Tibet for a much smaller stretch of land in Southern Tibet. Another invasion had then severed their links with the Il-Khans. Now the Pagmodru were at the mercy of the Sakya, who were happy to allow their estate to be gradually chipped away by their neighbours.²

Jangchub Gyaltsen was restless, energetic and charismatic, and if anyone could change the fortunes of the Pagmodru, it was he. He had done reasonably well in his religious education at Sakya, especially in the tantric practice of

Hevajra. At the end of the seven-year course he was asked if he wanted to be a governor or a monk. He replied enthusiastically, 'A monk!' But his tutor, and the Pagmodru estate, had other ideas. Telling him that he would never make a good monk, but could be an excellent governor, his tutor offered to switch his training to military strategy and leadership. Jangchub Gyaltsen learned that to govern he must first learn to serve, and that to direct people in their work he must be able to do the work himself.

So his new studies involved cooking, gathering wood, and tending horses and cattle. He was placed among children from humble backgrounds, and came to enjoy their company more than that of his social equals. Then when Jangchub Gyaltsen was twenty the governor of Pagmodru, who was also his uncle, was dismissed: he had proved so incompetent that he had been tried by the imperial envoys of the Mongol court and stripped of his post. The Pagmodru estate, feeling that Jangchub Gyaltsen was ready, offered him the position. It was a dubious honour. Though the governor of Pagmodru still bore the impressive title of myriarch, he was very much a poor cousin in Sakya-ruled Tibet.

Still, Jangchub Gyaltsen accepted the post, harbouring a secret ambition to restore Pagmodru to its former glory. He gathered around him a group of talented and devoted young men, and immediately started to challenge those who had chipped away at his myriarchy. A particular bone of contention was the estate of Yazang, which had broken away from Pagmodru by tricking Kubilai into writing an edict declaring it an independent myriarchy. Jangchub Gyaltsen took this matter to the court at Sakya, but the Sakya chief administrator was close to the Yazang rulers, and his verdict acknowledged the right of the Pagmodru to the estate while at the same time tacitly accepting the status quo. But Jangchub Gyaltsen was not one to give up lightly. Consequently, he kept up his complaints to the court while simultaneously harassing Yazang with his small and rather ineffective army. Eventually he managed to provoke the Sakya authorities into sending word to the Mongol court that this annoying upstart needed to be dealt with.

The Mongol government's head man in Tibet decided to deal with the problem personally. He was a Tibetan himself, called Wangtson, and his loyalty to the Mongols was matched by a burning personal ambition. Once he had arrived in Sakya he quickly went into action. His first move was a trick. He produced a spurious cousin of Jangchub Gyaltsen and insisted that the latter give up his governorship. The Sakya abbot signed a document dismissing

Jangchub Gyaltsen and giving the post to this ‘cousin’. When Jangchub Gyaltsen refused to be bullied in this way Wangtson adopted another approach, inviting him to an official banquet. Jangchub Gyaltsen was suspicious, but went anyway, telling his attendants that they were to flee immediately if there was any sign of treachery.

Sure enough, Wangtson arrested Jangchub Gyaltsen as soon as he arrived, and demanded an explanation as to why he had refused to give up his post. Jangchub Gyaltsen was typically stubborn. He said that he had never before heard of this long-lost relative. And even if he was genuine, how would he govern better, with no experience of politics? It would be, he said, like getting a leg to do the job of a head. Seeing that he would not budge, Wangtson threw Jangchub Gyaltsen in prison, telling him that he would not be released until he gave up his seal of office. For three months Jangchub Gyaltsen was confined and threatened with torture, but still he refused to back down. At last Wangtson let him go.

Hurrying back to his estate, Jangchub Gyaltsen had to deal with his neighbours, who had been persuaded by Wangtson to form an aggressive coalition. When Pagmodru held up under their attacks, Wangtson turned to trickery again, hatching another plan, this time with the full support of the Sakya chief administrator. An army of Sakya troops marched towards the Pagmodru estate, setting up camp in a local fort. The chief administrator offered mediation between Jangchub Gyaltsen and his neighbours. But when Jangchub Gyaltsen arrived to begin talks, the fort was surrounded by Sakya soldiers and he was captured. The chief administrator now had Jangchub Gyaltsen bound and whipped 135 times. Still unrepentant, he was next sent to Sakya, where he was subjected to public humiliations such as being led through the streets seated facing backwards on a bullock. Local people pelted him with clods of earth. When one of these hit him in the mouth, he said, ‘Now I eat the mud of Sakya – soon I will be eating Sakya itself!’ The Sakya administration had managed to turn a disagreement between local leaders into something much more serious and, thanks to its high-handed treatment of Jangchub Gyaltsen, created its own nemesis.

After several months of imprisonment at Sakya, reprieve came from an unexpected direction. Wangtson had returned to the Mongol court, and news had reached Sakya that he was angling for the position of chief administrator. Irked, the current chief administrator offered Jangchub Gyaltsen bail on condition that he return to face trial later that year. Of course, Jangchub

Gyaltsen had no intention of returning. All of his previous efforts had been made within the legal framework of Sakya rule, but he was now convinced that he would never find justice at Sakya. Instead he had decided to overthrow Sakya itself.

Meanwhile, frustrated in his personal ambitions and in his rivalry with Jangchub Gyaltsen, Wangtson decided on all-out war. He assembled the standing army of Mongol and Tibetan soldiers and sent it to destroy Pagmodru. Jangchub Gyaltsen's army, outnumbered but more highly motivated, defeated the aggressors and proceeded to take back many long-disputed neighbouring territories. The Sakya abbot then stepped in and tried to organise a truce, promising to review the legal claims of Pagmodru. But the dispute had gone too far for legal niceties: Jangchub Gyaltsen had lost faith in the system, and Wangtson desired only the utter defeat of Jangchub Gyaltsen. In the ensuing civil war, Jangchub Gyaltsen repeatedly got the upper hand. By 1350, he had taken the strategic forts of Central Tibet and conquered Lhasa. In 1353, the Sakya and their allies made one last concerted effort, assembling an army drawn from all of Pagmodru's enemies. Against this last great threat the Pagmodru army defended itself, and the allies had to retreat, burning the land and destroying settlements as they went. This was common practice, but this time the damage was particularly brutal, and even Samye monastery was damaged. After a final battle near Lhasa, Jangchub Gyaltsen emerged triumphant from the smoking, devastated landscape.

It was now clear to everyone involved that the balance of power had changed. In 1354, a peace conference was called by Lama Dampa, renowned scholar, former abbot and one of the few people left in the Sakya administration with any moral authority. The conference resulted in the submission of the Sakya chief administrator to the rule of Pagmodru. When Jangchub Gyaltsen angrily recounted the insults and injuries that had been inflicted upon him over the preceding years, the chief administrator could only apologise humbly, and accept the terms that he was offered. Peace was some way off yet, but Sakya rule, and with it the influence of the Mongols in Tibet, was effectively finished.

A NEW START

Despite the wrongs that had been done to him, and the drawn-out civil war that had led to his ultimate victory, Jangchub Gyaltsen was a political realist who saw little point in extravagant acts of vengeance. He left the Sakya estab-

lishment in place, but deprived it of any real power. He made no attempt to declare Tibet's independence from Mongol rule, but ceased to pay much attention to what was going on in Beijing. In any case, Sakya was in disarray. The Khon family (from the very beginning and still to the present day the heads of Sakya) had split in the 1320s into four aristocratic houses. Now one house conspired against the others to throw off Jangchub Gyaltsen's rule – but this was a hopeless task, and only led to further infighting.³ When the chief administrator died in suspicious circumstances, some said he had drunk himself to death after his humiliation, but others claimed that he was poisoned and that the duplicitous Wangtson, still trying to keep his hands on the reins of power, had done the deed.

As Sakya crumbled, Jangchub Gyaltsen spent the late 1350s reshaping Tibet. He set up a system of forts called *dzongs*, and replaced the Mongol legal code, which was widely perceived as unduly harsh, with a system drawing on that of the old Tibetan empire. In other ways Jangchub Gyaltsen tried to identify his new regime with that of the Tibetan tsenpos, even adopting the dress codes of the old Tibetan imperial court. The implication was clear: Tibet was under Tibetan rule again. All Mongols and those Tibetans who had assumed the customs and language of the Mongols were expelled from positions of power.⁴

Still, Jangchub Gyaltsen was happy to receive official recognition from the teetering Mongol empire, even if there was no substance to it. He accepted the title of *Tai Situ*, meaning 'Great Tutor', which still survives today as the title of a high lama in the Karma Kagyu school. And with the Sakyapas in disarray, it was the head of this school, the Karmapa, who now had the ear of the khans. The Karmapas have the distinction of being the longest line of reincarnate lamas in Tibet.⁵ The practice of selecting a successor to a monastic seat by finding the child into which his consciousness has been reborn (who is known as a *tulku*) is a special feature of Tibetan Buddhism. All varieties of Buddhism hold that the mind continues to exist after death and returns as the embryo of a new sentient being, and individuals have sometimes been identified as the rebirth of a great saint. But only in Tibet did this become the mechanism for selecting the successor to a high religious position. The identification of the reborn consciousness of the deceased leader was perhaps the only method available to the Tibetans that was powerful enough to rival the mystique of the clan lineages.

Though their Chinese patrons often referred to the tulkus as 'living Buddhas' (*huo fo*), this does not accurately reflect how they were understood

by Tibetans. The tulku is not usually considered a fully enlightened being; rather his predecessor is thought to have been spiritually advanced enough to control the process of rebirth. Tibetans continue to hold the Buddhist idea that what is reborn is not a permanent entity (a 'soul') but an ever-changing stream of consciousness. Thus the term 'reincarnation' is also misleading in that it suggests an unchanging soul incarnated in one body after another. The Tibetan system accepts that the tulku may be quite different from what he was in his previous lifetime and insists that most tulkus should follow a rigorous programme of study and meditation.

In any case the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, became famous as a scholar and meditator who stayed out of courtly politics, limiting himself to religious work and the settling of disputes. The khan seems to have been devoted to him as a teacher, and when Rangjung Dorje died in his fifties, the khan took an interest in his tulku, the new Karmapa Rolpai Dorje. This young man quickly developed a reputation to match his predecessor's as a visionary and scholar. When Rolpai Dorje declined the khan's invitation to his court because he was on a teaching tour, the khan sent another, expressed in the pleading tones of a religious supplicant.⁶ It was 1358, and Tibet was already essentially free from Mongol rule. Jangchub Gyaltsen, who had met this new Karmapa and knew that his role in Beijing could only be a religious one, had no objection to his going there. Once settled there, the Karmapa gave secret tantric instruction to the khan while instructing his children in the basics of Buddhism. At the same time he showed great dedication to social welfare, the alleviation of poverty and the liberation of the unjustly imprisoned. Wisely, he left Beijing shortly before the Mongols lost their grip on China. On the way home he performed the ceremony of bestowing a religious name for a little boy from Tsongkha, whom we will meet again soon.

By this time, popular grassroots movements aimed at toppling the foreign Mongol overlords were springing up all over China. The head of one of these movements, a peasant by birth, declared himself emperor of the new Ming dynasty in 1368. By arduous warfare the Mongols were pushed back to their old homelands in the north, leaving Tibet open to the Ming. However, preoccupied with fighting the Mongols, the Ming had no interest in a military role there beyond securing the Sino-Tibetan border. The two Tibetan commodities that did interest the Ming emperors, however, were horses and Buddhism. A steady flow of Tibetan horses into China was assured by the Tibetans' love of tea. Churning the Chinese green tea with butter and salt, the Tibetans made a

beverage more like a soup than the delicate infusions drunk in China, one ideally suited to a cold, gruelling day on the Tibetan plateau. The Chinese gave the Tibetans tea bricks in exchange for horses, and attempted to make this profitable by monopolising the trade in tea. However, a tea black market soon sprang up, supplying the Tibetans' need for affordable tea in large quantities.

As for Buddhism, the early Ming emperors were more sympathetic to it than many of their Chinese ancestors had been, and seem to have inherited the Mongols' fascination for the Tibetan version. By now Buddhism had all but vanished from India, so for the Chinese court Tibet was the religion's new international centre.⁷ With Jangchub Gyaltsen and his successors showing a polite lack of interest in visiting the Ming court, the new Ming emperor turned his attention to the Karmapa, who had been so close to the last Mongol khan. But Rolpai Dorje, similarly showing little interest in the new dynasty, sent a group of disciples to China instead of travelling there himself.

It was not until the reign of the Ming emperor Yong Le that a high lama was willing to travel to China again. By the time Yong Le came to power, the Ming had finally triumphed over the Mongols. Yong Le is widely regarded by Chinese historians as one of the greatest Chinese rulers of any age. Among his many achievements is the building of the palace in Beijing known today as the 'Forbidden City'. Here Yong Le, hoping to recreate the close religious and political relationship that had flourished between Kubilai and Pagpa, sent an invitation to the next Karmapa (the fifth in the lineage), Deshin Shegpa. 'My father and mother and both parents of the queen are now dead,' he wrote. 'You are my only hope, essence of Buddhahood. Please come quickly.'

After the usual prevarications, Deshin Shegpa agreed to travel to China, arriving in the capital in 1407. He soon revived the old patron–priest relationship by giving the empowerments of various tantric deities to the emperor and his wife. Yong Le was mightily impressed and commissioned an expensive set of five illustrated scrolls to record the many miraculous events that had been witnessed during the fortnight of empowerments. He also bestowed an imperial title on the Karmapa and offered to support the Karma Kagyu school. Perhaps he hoped to control Tibet by this means, in the same way that the Mongols had with the Sakyas. But the Karmapa turned the emperor down, insisting that imperial support should be for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The emperor agreed and proved true to his word, offering imperial titles to all other Tibetan lamas who visited his court. Then, a year later, the Karmapa announced that he was leaving for Tibet. Yong Le did not prevent him, perhaps

realising that his idea of a relationship mirroring the one between Kubilai Khan and Pagpa was impossible.⁸

THE VAST EXPANSE

The collapse of Mongol influence in Tibet in the middle of the fourteenth century marked the beginning of a period of independence. In political terms, Tibet was free from military incursions from the Mongols or any other neighbours. Relations with the Ming empire were good, facilitated by the horse/tea trade and the reverence of the Ming emperors for Tibetan lamas. Apart from securing their own borders, the Ming played no political role in Tibet, and the Tibetans did not perceive themselves as their subjects. In cultural terms, Tibetans had now absorbed a vast quantity of Buddhist texts from India and, with Indian Buddhism in swift decline, were no longer looking to Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan translators as their main sources of knowledge.

It was in any case time to consolidate that knowledge. The thousands of Buddhist scriptures translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit were brought together in great canonical collections. The orthodox canon, known as the Kangyur (containing the Buddha's own words) and the Tengyur (containing commentaries and treatises by Indian and early Tibetan masters), was assembled by the formidable scholar Buton Rinchendrup. Other canons created in this period include the collection of Nyingma tantras known as the Nyingma Gyubum, and the collection of Bonpo scriptures. Furthermore, new books written by Tibetan scholars elegantly summarised the great panoply of Buddhist thought and came to define the specifically 'Tibetan' form of Buddhism.⁹ For example, the authoritative texts for Tibetan medicine were written down in the form that is still used today.¹⁰ Indeed, most of the great thinkers whose work still determines the themes of Tibetan culture and religion cluster around this time, the classical period of Tibetan culture which we might be justified in calling a golden age.

In the middle of the fourteenth century one of these great thinkers, Longchenpa, the greatest scholar ever produced by Tibet's Nyingma tradition, was living in exile in a cave in the lushly forested foothills of the Himalayas, in modern Bhutan. He had unwittingly become the enemy of the new power in Tibet, Jangchub Gyaltsen, when he took one of the latter's rivals as his student. It was a strange development in a life that had been spent immersed in

philosophy, meditation and incredible visionary experiences, far from the turmoil of Tibetan politics. Yet here he was exiled in Bhutan.¹¹

Longchenpa, whose name is an honorific meaning ‘The Vast Expanse’, had started his wandering when he dropped out of university. He was one of the star students at the great monastic educational institution of the time, Sangpu, which had been founded by one of Atisha’s disciples in the eleventh century. Longchenpa had decided to become a monk at the age of twelve, having lost his mother at eight and then his father at eleven. He quickly mastered the curriculum at Sangpu, which included logic and the philosophical complexities of the Madhyamaka.

But Longchenpa’s time at university was marred by the small-mindedness of his fellow students. Sangpu was dominated by students from Eastern Tibet – Khampas. Though the university was located in Central Tibet, Kham and Amdo have always provided a high proportion of Tibet’s greatest scholars; as a Central Tibetan, Longchenpa was treated as an outsider. Such regional factionalism had been endemic in Tibetan monasteries from early times, and jealousy over Longchenpa’s precocious talent only seems to have made things worse. So at the age of twenty-seven he decided to drop out.

As he walked away from Sangpu, Longchenpa met an inquisitive monk who asked him why he was leaving. When Longchenpa told the monk how the Khampas had made his life unbearable, the monk encouraged Longchenpa to write something to publicise their behaviour. Thinking this an amusing idea, Longchenpa filled a single page with a satirical poem of thirty lines, one line for each letter of the Tibetan alphabet. The monk immediately took the page and pinned it to the main throne in Sangpu, where it caused quite a stir. The poem, which survives among Longchenpa’s works, begins:

Alike to the demons who roam the land of Kalinga,
Bandits of this snowy land are the Khampa tribe;
Come where they may, they tear the place down.
Desire, hatred and pride are the lands they roam;
Everywhere the clamorous Khampas gather there’s trouble.¹²

After having thus turned his back on a lifetime of study, Longchenpa dedicated himself to meditation practice and looking for a guru. His search for the latter came to an end when he met Kumaradza, a Ngagpa who was living on a mountainside with a large group of disciples in flimsy tents. Longchenpa was

accepted as a disciple, and joined this motley crew of dedicated meditators. His new life was very different from the ordered routine of the monastery. Kumaradza and his people kept moving from valley to valley, so there was no chance to settle anywhere. When the harsh Tibetan winter meant that they had to stay in one place for several months, cut off from all other human contact, the group subsisted on a few flour rations and medicinal pills.

All this time Longchenpa was receiving guidance in the way of the Great Perfection, the direct introduction to the nature of the mind. This meditation practice, transcending the conceptual systems of logic that he had mastered at university, kept him going through his hardships. It was also to become the essence of his life's work. It all came together one day when another of Kumaradza's disciples returned from a trip with a new book, containing a cycle of instructions on the Great Perfection called *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinis*. Longchenpa read it and was deeply impressed.

This was no ordinary book. It had been discovered by a *terton*, a visionary relevator who uncovers secret teachings hidden in the ground, in rocks or in the expanse of the sky. Over the last couple of centuries more and more of these hidden teachings, known as *terma*, had been coming to light. *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinis* had been discovered by a boy called Pema Ledrelsel, an ordinary teenager who had suddenly been beset by visions telling him where to find hidden scriptures. He claimed that what he discovered had originally been taught by Padmasambhava to Trisong Detsen and his daughter the princess. He, Pema Ledrelsel, said he was the rebirth of that princess, from whom he had taken his name. But he was a wild young man with little interest in putting the profound instructions he had revealed into practice; instead he spent much of his time drinking and sleeping with women. While still in his early twenties, he was poisoned by the husband of one of his many lovers. His *terma* might have vanished into obscurity had it not fallen into Longchenpa's hands.

After two years of hardship meditating with Kumaradza's community, Longchenpa was given permission to teach. The first thing he did was gather a small group of dedicated meditators, eight men and women. Over several days he performed the rituals of empowerment, and the group meditated together. Longchenpa's biography records in detail the succession of visions and trances that happened during this time. Everyone saw *dakinis*, the female spirits who protect the teachings of the Great Perfection, and the female meditators were possessed by Buddhist goddesses who spoke to Longchenpa, in turn berating

him for not performing the rituals correctly and valorising him as the one destined to spread the profound instructions of the Seminal Heart.

From this whirlwind of visions and visitations, Longchenpa emerged confident that he was indeed the one destined to elucidate the teachings of the Seminal Heart revealed by the ill-fated Pema Ledrelsel. He wrote and wrote – poetry, meditation instructions and philosophical analysis poured from him, and he built a great structure of poetic thought around the Seminal Heart. The logic and philosophical analysis that he had mastered at university now merged with the poetry of the Great Perfection, producing volumes of elegant and clear writings that are still held up as a pinnacle of Tibetan literature, philosophy and insight into the nature of reality.

Later, Longchenpa expressed his spiritual realisations in a letter to his guru, Kumaradza. This took the form of an elegant poem, far removed in style from the bitter satire of his first poem, a transcendence of all differences and disputes:

I am a buddha, pure from the very beginning,
And so are the multitude of living beings in existence.
The terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’
Are both wrong, nothing but dream and illusion;
The nonduality of right and wrong – that’s the state of a buddha.¹³

Longchenpa had come to see that the Khampa scholars who had forced him to drop out of university had done him a kindness. He had achieved far more than he ever could have within the walls of a monastery. As his writings circulated, Longchenpa’s fame grew, and he became known in the corridors of power. Sakya luminaries such as Lama Dampa paid their respects to him, and the head lama of Drigung became his disciple. But as the political scene in Tibet declined into civil war, Longchenpa found himself on the wrong side of history. Jangchub Gyaltsen, who had much experience of lamas getting involved in political intrigues, saw Longchenpa as another enemy, so the latter thought it best to head for the remote hillsides of Bhutan. Though he spent under a decade there, Longchenpa’s sojourn in Bhutan left a profound mark on that country, which today still venerates the temples he founded, preserves his teachings, and remembers that his only children were born and grew up there.

THE REVELATORS

By Longchenpa's time, religious revelators calling themselves tertons were appearing all over Tibet, producing great volumes of literature and claiming that they were ancient teachings from Tibet's imperial period. Though some Tibetans cast doubts on these claims, the tertons themselves were convinced of the authenticity of their revelations, and others found them to be powerful new meditation instructions, ideally suited to the needs of contemporary Tibetans. Most of these tertons said that their revelations were originally taught by the tantric adept Padmasambhava, who had been invited to Tibet in the eighth century to help with the construction of the great temple at Samye.

According to earlier histories, Padmasambhava had given some tantric teachings to Tibetans before being forced to leave due to the suspicions of the Tibetan court. But from the twelfth century an alternative story, itself a terma discovery, gave Padmasambhava a much greater role in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, and in particular credited him with travelling all over the country to convert the local spirits to Buddhism. Recognising that Buddhism would face great challenges in Tibet, he concealed holy objects and scrolls as he travelled. These were the terma, which he intended to be found by the destined ones, the tertons, who would help to rejuvenate Buddhism in Tibet.

Certainly during the Mongol dominion of Tibet there was a nostalgia for the time of the Buddhist kings, when Tibet had not only been ruled by Tibetans, but had dominated its neighbours instead of being dominated by them. Jangchub Gyaltsen played to this nostalgia when he replaced Mongol laws and customs with new ones based on Tibetan imperial models. The great popularity of terma during this same period may also owe something to this nostalgia, for the tertons claimed a direct link to the past. It was not enough for the terton just to dig up one of these hidden treasures. He had to be someone who had originally been taught the text by Padmasambhava in a previous life. Some tertons were said to have been the great tsenpo Trisong Detsen himself. Thus treasure revelation was not just discovery, it was remembrance of a text that had been placed in the mind of the terton in a previous life. The terma itself might be just a fragment of ancient scroll, or a small statuette, that acted as a mnemonic to help the terton to recover, in a state of visionary revelation, the text itself.¹⁴

The terma contained many prophecies attributed to Padmasambhava that dealt with the events of the terton's own time, and spoke of him as the one

destined to reveal the treasure. Some prophecies also dealt with the suspicions that the terma, and the behaviour of tertons such as Pema Ledrelsel, aroused in some Tibetans:

All the discoverers and disciples of terma who uphold the lineage of Padma
Will be worthy ones even if they act like dogs and pigs.
All such buddhas in disguise will drift about aimlessly;
Unlike ordinary people, they will be especially sublime.
But there will also be charlatans and tricksters, most hypocritical;
So do not mix up the gold and ore, o living beings!¹⁵

Some tertons have been tricksters, but most treated their revelations seriously, testing the teachings by putting them into practice, and waiting months or even years before publishing them. Many made their discoveries as teenagers or young men; quite a number died while young. The Tibetan tradition usually explains this by their failure to put their own revealed teachings into practice, or as karmic retribution for revealing them to the public too soon. But we can also see here an echo of other revelatory traditions, like the Romantic poets of the West – an image summarised in Wordsworth's famous line, 'We Poets in our youth begin in gladness, but thereof come in the end despondency and madness.'

Most terma are believed to go back to the original eighth-century teachings of Padmasambhava, and derive their power from this fact. In the terma themselves Padmasambhava comes to hold an even more exalted position, representing the lofty view of the Great Perfection itself, the mind that recognises that everything is pure from the very beginning. In this role as both a founder of Tibetan Buddhism and a symbol of the enlightened mind itself, he is affectionately known to all Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche, 'The Precious Guru', and he is invoked daily in a poem known as 'The Seven-Line Prayer':

Born in the heart of a lotus flower
In the northwestern country of Urgyen
And possessing the supreme attainment,
You are known as The Lotus Born,
Surrounded by hosts of dakinis;
When I follow in your footsteps,
I pray that you will come and bless me.

The dakinis, as mentioned earlier, are female spirits, embodiments of the enlightened activity of Padmasambhava. Most tertons had to be on good terms with the dakinis, for without their cooperation the terma would not be found. In some cases, the terton might discover a treasure, only to find the next day that the dakinis had taken it away again. The dakinis might also bring messages to tertons in dreams, or, as in Longchenpa's case, by taking possession of a female adept. Tertons often worked closely with real women as well, as the state of mind suitable to visionary revelation was often achieved through sexual yogic practices.

One terma became especially well known in the West when it was translated in the early twentieth century as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In fact, its proper name is *Bardo Todrol*, 'liberation through hearing in the bardo'. This means that it is a prayer to be recited to the dying and deceased to guide their consciousness through the visions of the intermediate state (*bardo*) between death and the next birth. In Buddhism, our mind is thought to have its own momentum, driven by our previous actions. Death is an opportunity for the mind, as it is unmoored from the body. The instructions to the dying are intended to guide the stream of consciousness in the right direction: 'O Child of the Buddha Nature, that which is called death has now arrived. You are leaving this world. But in this you are not alone. This happens to everyone. Do not be attached to this life! Do not cling to this life! Even if you remain attached and clinging, you do not have the power to stay, you will only continue to roam within the cycles of existence.'¹⁶

At the moment of death the mind sees its own true nature, and at this time a great meditator can achieve enlightenment, or the peaceful experiences of a Buddhist 'pure land'. For others, the dreamlike visions of the intermediate state arise based on past experiences. By negotiating these, one can achieve a good rebirth and avoid coming back as an animal, ghost or denizen of hell. The 'liberation through hearing in the bardo' is just one part of a series of prayers and meditation practices based on the peaceful and wrathful deities of the Magical Net tantras (which we encountered in the last chapter as the speciality of the Zur clan). The whole cycle of texts was revealed by a terton called Karma Lingpa in the fourteenth century.

This terton also died young, leaving his father to gather together his scattered visionary texts, and his young son to teach them to others. It was the fate of some treasures to sink with barely a trace, while others, such as Karma Lingpa's, became incredibly popular, cutting across the divides between religious schools by answering a need felt by all in the face of death. The appeal of 'liberation through hearing in the bardo' proved itself again when the afore-

mentioned English translation, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (trading on the fame of ancient Egypt's *Book of the Dead*), provided inspiration for a whole new audience, including psychologists such as C.G. Jung and connoisseurs of psychedelic mind-states such as Timothy Leary.

It was not only the Nyingma school that was finding a new lease of life through treasure revelation in the fourteenth century. Loden Nyingpo was a contemporary of Karma Lingpa, and also a tertön, but he grew up in a culture that was subtly different from Karma Lingpa's Buddhist background. For Loden Nyingpo was a Bonpo. What does this mean? Though some people call the old pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet 'Bon', it is unlikely that before Buddhism the Tibetans had a clear sense of practising a religion as such, or a specific name for these practices. In fact, the Bonpo religion only started to take shape alongside the revival of Buddhism in the eleventh century. And when the scriptures of the Bonpo started to appear in Tibet, it was mainly through the work of tertöns.¹⁷ Loden Nyingpo was not the first Bonpo tertön by any means, but he was one of the most influential, although he too died young, at the age of twenty-five. His vast terma, known as *The Brilliance*, contained the legendary biography of the founder of the Bonpo religion, and defined the religion itself in a way that is still influential today.

The story told by Loden Nyingpo's treasure is something like this. The founder of Bon was a man called Shenrab, who lived in Tazig (the land of the Tajiks, in or near Persia). He travelled far and wide in this world and beyond, accompanied by his many wives, sons and daughters, converting sinners both human and non-human. Later in his life he became a monk and meditated in a forest hermitage, where he contested with the Prince of Demons and finally converted him. Shenrab's life story echoes those of other figures, particularly Padmasambhava's travels and Shakyamuni's quest for enlightenment.

The Bonpos believe that the teachings of Shenrab travelled from the land of the Tajiks to the ancient Tibetan kingdom of Zhangzhung long before Buddhism came to Tibet. Turning the Buddhist histories on their heads, they see the great tsenpos as the villains of the piece, hated persecutors of Bon. The coming of Buddhism to Tibet is blamed on 'the perverse prayer of a demon', and the decline of the old religion is 'the setting of the sun of the Doctrine'. The disintegration of the Tibetan empire is of course put down to the malign influence of Buddhism. In this topsy-turvy history (at least from the Buddhist point of view), Bonpo tertöns such as Loden Nyingpo were the culture heroes who rescued the old religion from obscurity.

But in truth the 'old religion' was a new religion, an inspired conjunction of Tibet's pre-Buddhist myths and rituals with the teachings of Buddhism. The scriptures of the Bonpo were called sutras and tantras, and looked much like Buddhist scriptures. Sometimes the differences seemed merely cosmetic. Instead of the Buddhist symbol of indestructible wisdom known as the *vajra*, the Bonpo scriptures and art used the swastika, an ancient symbol of eternal truth. And instead of walking around stupas in a clockwise direction, the Bonpos circumambulated their (almost identical) stupas in the opposite direction. Thus many Buddhists called this new old religion 'transformed Bon', suggesting that the Bonpos had merely taken Buddhist texts and art and transformed them into something a little bit different.

This is probably unjust. Bonpo literature comprises hundreds of thousands of pages of rituals, prayers, meditation techniques, history and cosmology. And it was the hands of young tertons such as Loden Nyingpo who wrote these down, based on their visions and the coded scrolls they found in rocks and earth. The message of the Bonpo tertons was that Tibetan techniques such as divination, astrology and spirit-taming were as much a part of the spiritual path as the teachings in the sutras and tantras. This allowed Bonpo priests to be embedded in local communities, where they provided the services that people needed in order to deal with births, marriages, deaths and other events that occur in the course of an ordinary life in any part of the world.¹⁸

After Loden Nyingpo's short life, when *The Brilliance* was becoming famous, another milestone for the Bonpo religion occurred with the founding of Menri monastery in Central Tibet. This became the centre for study in the Bonpo religion, and was active in Tibet until the 1950s (there is now a New Menri in India). Here saffron-robed monks lived a life much like their Buddhist counterparts, performing similar daily rituals and aiming, in theory at least, at the liberation of all beings in the state of enlightenment. And yet even in the early twentieth century Buddhists and Bonpos held radically different ideas regarding what was the valid religion of Tibet. It was only after the 1950s, when all Tibetan religion suffered the same persecution and Bonpos went into exile along with Buddhists, that these two groups came to see how much they held in common. When the Dalai Lama declared the Bonpo one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, few Bonpos disputed it. Buddhists have likewise come to appreciate the Bonpo legacy as a vital part of Tibet's cultural heritage, something distinctly Tibetan and quite unlike any religion found anywhere else in the world.

THE MAN FROM TSONGKHA

Travelling back from a stay at the court of the Mongol emperor in 1359, the fourth Karmapa stopped in the region of Tsongkha in northeastern Amdo. Among many visitors who came for blessings and advice, a toddler was brought to him, a little boy whose intelligence and seriousness had already been noticed by his parents and the local monks. The Karmapa performed the naming ceremony for the boy, giving him the religious vows of the layman and the name Kunga Nyingpo. When he grew up and travelled to Central Tibet, he would become known by another name, Tsongkhapa, ‘The Man from Tsongkha’. He would shake up the religious life of Tibet, and his spiritual descendants, who would include the Dalai Lamas, would transform its political life.¹⁹

But for now Tsongkhapa was just a young monk from the further reaches of the Tibetan world. In his childhood he had been taken under the wing of a local Sakya lama, and had practised tantric meditation intensively from a young age. But his teacher felt he ought to study philosophy at the great centres of learning. So, like many other bright and promising young monks from Eastern Tibet, Tsongkhapa left his homeland at the age of sixteen to travel to Central Tibet. As he was leaving, his teacher handed him a piece of paper with detailed instructions for his course of study. Unfortunately, Tsongkhapa lost this note before he arrived, though he had memorised the first few lines, enough to get him started. Thus began his odyssey through the many traditions and teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.²⁰

His first stop was at Drigung monastery, recently rebuilt and once again fully functional after Kubilai Khan’s army had burned it to the ground in a brutal response to the Drigung rebellion. Tsongkhapa spent a year here studying the meditation practices of the Great Seal and learning the basics of medicine. Then he decided that it was time to embark on a course of serious philosophical study. At this time the philosophical tradition was still largely taught in Sakya monasteries, despite the recent collapse of Sakya political power, so that is where Tsongkhapa began his studies. Soon it became clear to his fellow students what an exceptional scholar Tsongkhapa was. After two years of intensive study he decided to embark on a debating tour. Though Tsongkhapa was only nineteen, he felt ready to face this challenge.

A debating tour was a common way for Sakya scholars to test their philosophical mettle. They would travel from one monastic university to the next, engaging in scholarly debates which could also serve as oral exams leading to

various qualifications. So Tsongkhapa, like other intelligent and ambitious young scholars of his time, travelled from one monastery to the next, taking classes with famous teachers and honing his debating skills. Political problems at Sakya monastery resulted in Tsongkhapa having to make three attempts to take his exams there, but at last he received his official qualifications in the study of the Perfection of Wisdom, one of the five main topics of the Sakya curriculum.²¹

Tsongkhapa's restless intellect kept him on the move. By temperament he was unwilling to be institutionalised, and so never settled at any of the monastic universities. Dissatisfied with the explanations he got from most teachers, he moved on again and again. This changed when he met Rendawa, a maverick Sakya philosopher with an unusual interpretation of the philosophy of the Madhyamaka. Tsongkhapa saw in Rendawa somebody who could match his own questing intellect, and stayed with him for some time. He expressed his respect for Rendawa in a brief verse, which Rendawa later rewrote and dedicated to Tsongkhapa himself. This second version, now known as the Migtsema, is still often recited in praise of Tsongkhapa:

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of faultless kindness,
Manjushri, master of stainless knowledge,
Tsongkhapa, crown jewel of Tibetan scholars,
I prostrate at the feet of Losang Drakpa.

With Rendawa's help, Tsongkhapa studied for the remaining four exams of the Sakya curriculum. It was during this period that he began to suffer from the chronic back pain that would afflict him throughout the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he mastered the texts, took the exams and passed them all. Now in his early thirties, and increasingly confident, Tsongkhapa began writing commentaries, teaching and starting to gather students. From now on he would share his peripatetic lifestyle with a group of dedicated disciples who studied and meditated together. This band of monks became well known for their distinctive look. Eschewing the usual Tibetan robes of heavy wool, Tsongkhapa and his students patched their robes together from whatever scraps they could find in the style of the Buddha's early disciples in India.²² Tsongkhapa spent years with his ragged disciples, concentrating on tantric meditation, deity yoga from the Sakya tradition and meditation on the body's internal energies from the Kagyu traditions.

During this period of wandering Tsongkhapa met teachers from across the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The one who impressed him most was an unconventional fellow known as Lama Umapa. He had grown up as a shepherd in faraway Amdo, Tsongkhapa's own homeland, where as a child he had experienced a vision of the Black Manjushri, a form of the bodhisattva of wisdom found in the Sakya tradition. As he grew up and began to practise meditation, visions of Manjushri came on a daily basis, and Umapa would ask the deity about his day-to-day concerns. Tsongkhapa was keen to receive Umapa's special empowerments, so the two went into retreat together for a while. Afterwards Umapa returned to his wanderings, taking a meandering route back towards his homeland in Amdo.

Meanwhile, Tsongkhapa was gradually becoming convinced that his intellectual knowledge needed to be deepened with meditative insight, and that only an intensive retreat could accomplish this. He picked eight of his best students to accompany him on a four-year retreat. Just like Longchenpa and his disciples, Tsongkhapa's band experienced visions, both individually and as a group, that convinced them of the efficacy of their meditation. The retreat was a great success, but the final piece of the puzzle that would form Tsongkhapa's complete vision for the Buddhist path was not yet in place.

This came when Tsongkhapa visited the little Nyingma monastery of Lhodrag, one of the few places that still maintained the teachings of Atisha and the Kadam school. Kadam had been gradually eclipsed by Sakya during the Mongol period; most of the Kadam monasteries had become Sakya monasteries, its scholarship had been absorbed into the Sakya curriculum, and its instructions on mind training and the graduated path were now only passed on by a few lamas such as the abbot of Lhodrag monastery. Though the Sakya had their own teachings on these subjects, Tsongkhapa was coming to realise that he wanted to create something new, not necessarily a school, but at least a new formulation of the Buddhist path.

The opportunity to put this into writing came a few years later, when, reunited with his lama Rendawa, Tsongkhapa went to stay at Radreng monastery, the original home of the Kadam tradition. Here he wrote his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, a book on the graduated path that combined the approach of Atisha with Tsongkhapa's own personal interpretation of the philosophy of the Madhyamaka. He did much of his writing sitting on a rocky outcrop above the monastery, often with a portrait of Atisha by his side. After he had completed

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this work, he wrote his *Great Exposition of the Secret Mantra*, considering these two works together to cover the entirety of the Buddhist path.

By this time Tsongkhapa was nearly fifty and had become one of the most famous teachers in Tibet. When he chose a monastery to winter in, he would now be accompanied by hundreds of disciples. Thus it was that he received an invitation from the Chinese emperor Yong Le, patron of many Tibetan lamas. True to his own path, Tsongkhapa turned it down so that he could continue to teach and refine his own philosophical views. But in his place he sent a disciple, who succeeded in gaining the patronage of the emperor. Tsongkhapa had powerful supporters in Tibet too, including members of Tibet's ruling Pagmodru family, the successors of Jangchub Gyaltsen.

Though Tsongkhapa continued to travel and teach throughout his fifties, it was becoming clear that his lifestyle was exacerbating his health problems, and some of his disciples suggested that he stay in one place while they built a monastery for him. Tsongkhapa agreed and, with funding from his patrons, work soon began on the monastery. In the same year, 1409, Tsongkhapa had the idea of starting a prayer festival to be held every new year at Lhasa. The first was a great success, and so the annual Great Prayer Festival became a tradition that continued until it was banned by the Communists in the mid-twentieth century.

In his last years Tsongkhapa's back pain grew worse, and he even accepted the advice of his disciples to try the hot springs near Lhasa, though as usual he was followed by dozens of monks and ended up giving teachings there. When he passed away aged sixty-two, his new monastery had just been completed; it was given the name Ganden, meaning 'Joyful'. His corpse was mummified and placed in a stupa in the new monastery's grounds. The extraordinary life of the man from Tsongkha was over, but his influence on the religious and political history of Tibet had only just begun to be felt.

POLEMICS

By personality a seeker after truth with no time for institutions, Tsongkhapa had shown little interest in establishing a new school. In fact, he seems to have considered himself part of the tradition of Sakya scholarship, which was, after all, a broad church. It was Tsongkhapa's disciples, especially the heads of the new Ganden monastery, who began to sketch the outlines of a new school. It was a precarious identity, for it would have been easy for the Gandenpas to

have been absorbed back into Sakya when so many of Tsongkhapa's teachers and students were themselves from that school.²³

Much of the credit for defining and defending the new school must go to Tsongkhapa's student Khedrup. He was educated in the Sakya tradition and studied closely with Tsongkhapa's own teacher Rendawa. At the tender age of sixteen, he is said to have defended the views of the great philosopher Sakya Pandita against a formidable scholar, after the older monks had been reduced to accepting that their forebear's work was full of contradictions. But the crucial moment in Khedrup's life came when Rendawa introduced him to Tsongkhapa. The young monk was hugely impressed by Tsongkhapa, both personally and by his philosophical ideas. From now on Khedrup was to be Tsongkhapa's most forthright defender.

After a few years of study with Tsongkhapa, Khedrup left for Tsang, where he meditated, taught and sought patronage to found new monasteries. The biggest of the latter was Palkor Dechen. Here Khedrup now based himself, and worked to defend Tsongkhapa's philosophy against the increasing attacks from Sakya scholars. A great opportunity arose when the monastery's patron promised to arrange a debate with the pre-eminent Sakya scholar of the day, Rongton. Everything was arranged, including the precise date and the scholars who were to act as judges, and Rongton arrived at the monastery. Whereupon the monastery's patron suddenly declared that there was more important business to attend to and left the monastery with Rongton. Khedrup was furious. Rongton left one of his students to debate in his place, but, faced with the angry countenance of Khedrup, the poor substitute began to stutter, leading Khedrup to ask witheringly, 'What is it you want to say, fool?' Afterwards, Khedrup wrote some inflammatory verses that he nailed to the door of the monastery in a final attempt to incite Rongton to debate with him:

First you say, 'You must debate with me!'
 But then, full of anxiety,
 You utter some excuse like
 'I didn't make them cancel it!'
 Always sneaking off to your bolthole of lies,
 Without the robes of shame or guilt,
 Wearing loosely the girdle of your vows,
 You hide in secret behind the curtains
 Of the abusive words of your stupid students.²⁴

After that, Khedrup stormed off to a monastery in the mountains. This episode provides a dramatic example of the irritations faced by many famous teachers in Tibet. However well known they might be, they needed financial support for their activities, and were often dependent on wealthy patrons. When Khedrup's patron despatched some attendants to try to persuade him to return, he sent them another biting verse:

Imagine the lion of the snowy mountains,
 With his terrifying fangs and powerful claws,
 Chained up like a watchdog and fed on shit;
 How the scholars would laugh!

Khedrup abandoned this particular patron, seeing himself, for the moment, as a lone snow lion stalking the mountain passes. Frustrated in his ambitions to debate with the great Sakya scholar, Khedrup decided to concentrate on writing explanations and defences of Tsongkhapa's works, and criticisms of the work of other scholars. A few years later he met the abbot of the newly founded Ganden monastery, Gyaltsab, another student of Tsongkhapa. Gyaltsab was older than Khedrup, and had actually debated with Rongton – and lost. This was part of the reason for Khedrup's frustration at being robbed of the chance to defeat Rongton in debate. In any case, Gyaltsab asked the younger student to take up the abbacy of Ganden.

In his new post Khedrup could exert much more influence over the direction of the Gandenpas. Whereas Gyaltsab had been firmly rooted in the Sakya school, and never really considered himself to have broken away from it, Khedrup now made that break and worked to establish a distinct identity for the Gandenpas. One effective tactic he adopted was to change the colour of the hat worn by the Ganden abbot from the red favoured by the Sakya to yellow. Though this idea was borrowed from another school that had broken away from Sakya, the Bulug, that school died out, leaving the Gandenpas as the only 'Yellow Hats' in Tibet.

Another problem for Tsongkhapa's students was that, unlike the older schools, they could not point to founding fathers who had brought teachings back from India. Their tantric practices were from the Sakya and Kagyu schools, and their scholastic background was Sakya through and through. With little else to differentiate them from their forebears, Khedrup and other like-minded students focused on the new philosophical interpretations offered

by Tsongkhapa, which they claimed represented the true intentions of the great Indian Buddhist scholars. Naturally, others were not convinced. The Sakyapas, following the conservative lead of Sakya Pandita, generally frowned upon innovations, stating sternly that authentic Buddhist teaching should be traceable back to its Indian sources. Khedrup hit back with his ‘secret biography’ of Tsongkhapa, which recorded visions and meditative experiences; in this work, Khedrup revealed that Tsongkhapa had experienced numerous visions of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom. Not only that, but he had been able to converse with Manjushri, and the bodhisattva had explicitly approved Tsongkhapa’s philosophical stance. This, for Tsongkhapa’s followers at least, cleared up the problem of authenticity.²⁵

Khedrup’s definition of the new school according to its strict adherence to one Tibetan scholar’s philosophical ideas was a new kind of orthodoxy, quite different from what had gone before. When patronage from the Chinese emperor allowed Tsongkhapa’s works to be circulated in printed form, they became the pillar of the school’s identity. Khedrup wrote the authoritative commentaries on these, which were also printed. Meanwhile the works of other disciples of Tsongkhapa offering different interpretations were not printed, struggled to find an audience and were sometimes actively suppressed. Thus an orthodoxy quickly formed, and was consolidated by the publishing of the debate manuals (*yigcha*), setting out the orthodox philosophical position and refutations of divergent views.

Much of this philosophical debate was about the Madhyamaka, or ‘Middle Way’, which began with the work of the Indian scholar Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna’s philosophy is a critique of the idea that anything exists independently. This second-century AD scholar claimed that he himself was putting forward no theories, but only analysing other people’s to show that they were untenable. He tried to show that it was impossible to maintain of anything that:

- (i) it exists;
- (ii) it does not exist;
- (iii) it both exists and does not exist;
- (iv) it neither exists nor does not exist.

This is based on the idea that for something to exist it must be independent. For instance, since the reflection of the moon in a pool of water depends on the light of the moon, the pool and the person looking at the pool, we can

hardly say that the moon's reflection 'exists' independently of these factors. Yet since it is clearly visible, we cannot call it 'nonexistent' either. Nor will some combination of the ideas of existence and nonexistence, or a denial of both, be satisfactory. This, Nagarjuna argued, was true of anything said to exist, and this truth was known as 'emptiness'. The idea was not Nagarjuna's, for it had already been expressed in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, and is summarised in the Heart sutra in the famous lines: 'Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, perception, motivation and consciousness are empty.'

Along with thoroughly deconstructing the idea of objective existence, Nagarjuna's other great contribution to Buddhist thought was the idea of two levels of truth. When things are thoroughly analysed there is nothing we can say about them; emptiness goes beyond the range of language, since language is based on the existence of things and their having attributes. Yet we need language in order to communicate about the world. Not wanting to destroy the distinctions between what is right and wrong, true and untrue, Nagarjuna said that while these distinctions are only relative, they exist on the level of conventional truth, the day-to-day conventions of our ordinary perceptions and conversations. Belief in the true existence of these conventions locks people into suffering, but it is only through conventions, through language, that the Buddhist path can be taught.

In Tibet, the greatest philosophical debates centred on Nagarjuna's ideas and those of the Indian scholars who followed him.²⁶ For most Sakya scholars, the level of conventional truth consisted merely of labels, all of which when subjected to analysis were found to be empty: that was their nature on the ultimate level. Thus the perception of one level of truth or another depended on whether one analysed things or not. Since this analysis led one beyond labels (or words, or concepts) completely, the ultimate level was nonconceptual, hence the reason why meditation practice was thought to be essential for allowing the mind to rest in the ultimate nature of things – the unity of appearances and their emptiness.

For Tsongkhapa, this was taking Nagarjuna's ideas about things being beyond existence and nonexistence a bit too far. Such nonconceptual resting in emptiness could only be a blank state of mind, a trap. For Tsongkhapa, the laws of logic should apply at every level. Doing away with both the idea of 'existence' and the idea of 'nonexistence' violated the law of logic known as the excluded middle. Tsongkhapa insisted that one should first establish the nature of conventional

reality very precisely using the tools of Buddhist logic, and then one should refute only the attribute of ‘true existence’, leaving the remainder of conventional truth intact. This, Tsongkhapa and his followers felt, was an elegant solution.²⁷

The Sakya scholars who criticised Tsongkhapa argued that his solution forced the two levels of truth into complete separation, a conventional truth of real things and an ultimate truth of emptiness. This would mean that one could never really get to the ultimate truth, making enlightenment impossible. Rather like Kant’s argument that existence is not a predicate, they argued that to treat ‘true existence’ as a quality that could be refuted while leaving all other concepts intact did not lead to a genuine understanding of emptiness. Or, as some Sakya scholars put it, it was like knocking off somebody’s hat.²⁸

As Khedrup and later followers of Tsongkhapa hit back at accusations like these, they defined their own philosophical tradition, and this went a long way to drawing a line in the sand between the Gandenpas and the broader Sakya tradition. In time, the Gandenpas changed their name too, in recognition of the fact that they had moved beyond being the inhabitants of one particular monastery in Central Tibet. They now became the Gelug, ‘The Virtuous Tradition’. Under this name, and under the leadership of the Dalai Lamas, they grew to become the most widespread and powerful of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism.²⁹

LIFE IN THE MONASTERIES

Soon after Tsongkhapa passed away, his disciples founded two more monasteries, called Drepung and Sera. Though these were not particularly large to begin with, they grew fast, and along with Ganden came to form a triumvirate of massive Gelug monasteries that would dominate the religious and political life of Central Tibet for centuries. All three were near Lhasa, which was home to some of Tibet’s oldest temples but had never really been at the centre of Tibetan monastic life. The monasteries and the annual Great Prayer Festival founded by Tsongkhapa made Lhasa very much the centre of the new Gelug school. From this time onwards Tibet’s monasteries grew and grew. Before the suppression of Buddhism by the Communists in the mid-twentieth century, Tibet had the largest proportion of monks – as much as a quarter of the entire adult population – of any Buddhist country. On the other hand, nuns were not a part of this movement, as full monastic ordination for women had not been revived in Tibet after the dark age. The role of nuns in Tibet’s religious culture remained marginal, and their role in political life almost nonexistent.³⁰

This uniquely high number of monks in Tibet has been called 'mass monasticism' by some modern scholars and described as 'one of human history's most ambitious and radical social and psychological experiments'. That such a large proportion of Tibetan society lived their whole lives as celibate world-renouncers is so unusual that we need to ask how it came about. Tibet's monks followed a set of rules (the Vinaya) brought from India that were as strict as those in any other Buddhist country. In fact, the version of the monastic rule followed by Tibetan monks has slightly more rules than that followed by the Theravada monks of South and Southeast Asia.

However, the expansion of the monasteries, as with any growing institution, meant that the standard for entrance was lowered. A Tibetan saying has it that the great monasteries are like the ocean, containing all kinds of fish. Few restrictions were placed on the conduct of monks, as long as they did not seriously breach the basic rules of monasticism, such as celibacy. At times, these rules were honoured in the letter, but not the spirit; for example, though heterosexual sex was punished with expulsion from the monastery, one kind of homosexual sex was very much a part of monastic life. Senior monks often took a young monk under their wing as a *drombo*, a passive sexual partner; since the kind of sex practised in this context did not involve penetration, it was not considered a breach of the rules. There was no stigma on either party, and the younger monk was considered fortunate to have the protection of the elder.³¹

At the far end of the spectrum were the dob-dobs, or 'punk monks', tough guys who carried heavy clubs, keeping order in the monastery, acting as bodyguards to the lamas and even fighting for the monastery's interests when necessary. The dob-dobs also carried out many of the monastery's most menial tasks such as carrying water and preparing food. When not assigned to such a task, the dob-dobs trained together every day, exercising and practising fighting with their heavy clubs. They grew their hair long and wore a different version of monks' standard robes. They had their own hierarchy and a strict code of honour, breaches of which might be settled with a duel by sword. When two monasteries became involved in major disputes, the dob-dobs of each often fought one other in bloody battles.³²

The only hard-and-fast requirement for membership of a monastery was to participate in the monastery's rituals, the main focus of life at the monastery for most monks. These included regular rituals such as the fortnightly confession and the annual celebration of the Buddha's birth. But the majority of the

rituals were performed for wealthy sponsors, and it was these that dominated monastic life, simply because they kept the monasteries financially viable. Monasteries provided accommodation for their monks, but everything else had to be obtained out of their own funds. At the daily rituals the monks would be provided with tea and food, which might be their only chance to eat during the day, ensuring a high turnout at these gatherings. Some monks had wealthy families or other sponsors. Others had some kind of business on the side, ranging from dabbling in trade to owning hundreds of horses and yaks. As for study, this was optional and only undertaken by those with a particular vocation. Those who chose this route had to work very hard indeed, in a daily routine that would start at dawn and end not long before midnight. Since this left them little time to engage in the profitable activities of the less studious monks, the scholars were among the poorest residents of the monasteries.³³

Monks who wanted to meditate were even less well served by the larger monasteries, and often left. Just as Longchenpa did when he left Sangpu, they might join a large group of a hundred or more students of meditation gathered around a famous teacher. Physically these communities would often consist of encampments, either based around a hermitage, or moving from one site to another. Some in these communities would be engaged in a long period of intensive meditation practice, a retreat that traditionally lasted for up to three years. There were some smaller monasteries that specialised in meditation, and the nunneries in particular were often famous centres for meditation practice, the lower social status of nuns meaning that they had fewer sponsors, and thus fewer obligations than monks.³⁴

In the large monasteries monks were divided into different residences depending on where they came from, and life tended to centre on these regional colleges. One route to power in the monastery and beyond was to become a steward of one of the monastic colleges. A large number of administrators worked within the monasteries, many of them dealing with their complicated finances. Each monastery had its own estates, and all the people farming on these estates paid taxes in money and goods. One of the main tasks of the stewards was to increase this income; for instance, by lending grain back to the peasants at high interest rates, or selling goods at market. Before the destruction of the monasteries in the 1960s they owned as much as half of Tibet's farmland.³⁵

Thus Tibetan monasteries were, like the medieval monasteries of Europe, centres of power and commerce. But we should also consider the dedication of

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the best of the monks, who spent most of the hours of the day in study, in spite of hunger and tiredness. From the monasteries came Tibet's great exemplars of Buddhist learning, wisdom and compassion. And while there were many vibrant communities of lay practitioners in Tibet (such as Longchenpa's entourage), it is unlikely that Buddhism would have survived, let alone flourished, in Tibet without the institutional solidity provided by the monasteries.

CIVIL WAR

Not long after the death of Tsongkhapa, the ruling house of Central Tibet, the Pagmodru, was split in two. The reigning family of Pagmodru based in the province of U, where Lhasa is located, opposed the Rinpung princes based in the neighbouring province of Tsang. This tension soon developed a sectarian aspect, with the rulers in U supporting the Gelug school and those in Tsang supporting the Karma Kagyu. Now was the Karma Kagyu's time at the centre of political power in Tibet. They had cultivated a strong relationship with the Ming emperors on the one hand and the Rinpung princes on the other. The two most powerful figures in the school were the Karmapa and the Shamar, or Red Crown lama (distinguished by this name from the Karmapa, who wore a black crown). They were both based in a massive camp that moved continually between their monasteries during the year. Tibetans called this tented city the 'Encampment'.³⁶

In its heyday the mighty Encampment was the centre of religious, political and artistic life in Tibet. For a while the Karma Kagyu had had no problem with the expanding Gelug school, but now, in the growing turmoil, instead of sharing a common patron, the two schools found themselves funded by opposing rulers. The conflict might have been mainly political in origin, but the willingness of the monks to take up arms and fight for their schools made it impossible to keep religion out of it. The enmity between the Gelug and Karma Kagyu came to a head in the 1480s when a Rinpung minister tried to build a Karma Kagyu monastery in Lhasa. He was opposed by the governor of Lhasa, a supporter of the Gelug. The monastery was built outside Lhasa instead, but soon after its completion a large group of monks from the Gelug monasteries arrived under cover of night and destroyed it. This sectarian violence gave the rulers of Tsang the excuse they needed to send troops into Lhasa. The Gelug monks were confined to their monasteries and banned from assembling at the Great Prayer Festival.

This bitter civil war between the ruling houses, each supporting different Buddhist schools, could only ingrain religious intolerance more deeply in Tibetan culture. It marked the beginning of centuries of deep enmity between the Gelug and Kagyu schools. Meanwhile, the Sakya, formerly lords of Tibet, went into a slow decline due to a lack of major sponsors. One Sakya scholar, Shakya Chogden, managed to turn this to his advantage. When the ruler of U declared that everyone in the realm had to be educated in the philosophy of Tsongkhapa, believing that this would convert them all to the Gelug approach, Shakya Chogden familiarised himself with Tsongkhapa's works, only later to become one of the sharpest critics of Gelug philosophy.³⁷

But outside the little world of Central Tibet, events were in progress that would change the balance of power for ever. Away from the centre, Tibet was still divided into petty kingdoms, and the Ming dynasty was too weak to influence either these Tibetan areas or the Mongolian steppe to the north. And the Mongols were back. If not the great united force that they had once been, the Mongol horsemen were still fierce warriors, more than a match for Tibet's small armies. As the Mongols started to encroach again on the kingdoms of Eastern Tibet, alliances started to spring up between Mongol leaders and Tibetans keen to be on good terms with them. One such alliance would soon become much more important than the rest: the relationship between a certain Mongol prince and the Gelug lama whom he called 'Dalai'.



6

The Rise and Fall of the Dalai Lamas, 1543–1757

AMONG THE MONGOLS

The young man who was to become the Dalai Lama sat in his saddle, waiting for the Mongols to arrive. Though only fifteen, he had been invited by a Mongol prince to Tibet's northern borderlands. This was Amdo, a rolling grassland under vast skies, swept by wild and biting winds. It was quite different from the steep hills and valleys of his homeland in Central Tibet. The people were different too. While Central Tibet was studded with castles and monasteries, here he saw only great nomad felt-tent encampments, with hundreds of horses and sheep grazing on the plains. Once the Mongols had been Buddhists, so it was said, converted by the Sakya lamas. Now they seemed to have forgotten their religion, and the old Mongol rituals, including animal sacrifice, were all that was known.¹

The young lama was enthusiastically received by his hosts, and taught Buddhism to the prince and his family, but he saw that much more effort would be required to bring Buddhism to the Mongol people. Thus, when he departed again to attend to his duties at home, he left a task unfinished. Though he had not yet received the title of Dalai Lama, this young man was already an important figure in the Gelug school. When he was born, his parents had feared for his life, for all of their previous children had died in early childhood. For this reason they fed him on the milk of a white nanny goat, instead of his mother's own milk. The baby thrived, and they gave him the name Ranusi, 'Protected by Goat's Milk'. At the age of three, he was

recognised by Gelug lamas as the rebirth of a recently deceased abbot. Shortly afterwards he took the lay vows and the religious name of Sonam Gyatso: 'Ocean of Merit'.²

Sonam Gyatso returned to a life of many responsibilities. His residence, known as the Ganden Palace, was at Drepung monastery, but he was also the abbot of Sera monastery, and had another job as personal tutor to the Pagmodru ruler in U. Even in his teens he was expected to tour the various Gelug monasteries of Central Tibet, and in his twenties he founded a whole series of new monasteries. Not until he was in his thirties did Sonam Gyatso have the opportunity to travel to Mongolia again. This time the invitation came from a Mongol leader called Altan Khan. After the collapse of the Mongol empire in the fourteenth century, the Mongols had returned to their old tribal allegiances. Altan Khan's tribe was the Tumed, and they were currently in the ascendant, winning battles against other Mongol tribes and the soldiers of the Ming dynasty. Altan Khan saw the political benefits in presenting himself as a new Kubilai; to play this role, he needed a new Pagpa, a loyal Tibetan lama who could bring Buddhism to the people and prestige to the Mongol court.³

The first Mongol delegation arrived in 1574, but Sonam Gyatso put them off, and it was not until the winter of 1577, when a second delegation arrived, that he agreed to go with them to Mongolia. His destination was near Hohhot in what is now Inner Mongolia. It was a long journey across Tibet's great northern plateau, the Changtang; travelling in the middle of winter, the party was constantly hit by icy blizzards. But when Sonam Gyatso at last reached the tented court of Altan Khan, he received a warm welcome. The lama and the khan wasted no time in entering into a relationship of priest and patron modelled on that between Pagpa and Kubilai Khan in the thirteenth century. Sonam Gyatso bestowed teachings and tantric initiation upon Altan Khan. In return, he received a promise of patronage, and a Mongolian title that was partly a translation of Sonam Gyatso's own name: *Ghaikhamtsig vcir-a dar-a say-in cogh-tu buyan-tu dalai*, 'The Wondrous Vajra-Holder, Excellent, Splendid Meritorious Ocean', a mouthful that was quickly shortened by the Tibetans to 'Dalai'. Thus Sonam Gyatso became the first Tibetan to receive the title Dalai. Since he was the third in a line of rebirths the title was posthumously awarded to his predecessors, which made him the third Dalai Lama.

Sonam Gyatso was never to return to Central Tibet. Accepting the invitation of another king, he travelled to Eastern Tibet to teach.⁴ But a few years later, in

1583, Altan Khan died, and Sonam Gyatso returned to consolidate his relationship with the khan's son. With the support of the new khan, Sonam Gyatso travelled through Mongolia as a missionary, converting the Ordos Mongols, among others, to Buddhism. Though there were other Tibetan missionaries, Sonam Gyatso's activities had a huge impact on the Mongolians, who have been followers of Tibetan Buddhism ever since.

In the midst of his Mongolian travels, Sonam Gyatso died on the shores of Lake Jighasutai. With the military muscle of the Mongols apparently being applied in the service of the Gelug school, the issue of finding the new Dalai Lama suddenly gained fresh significance. The situation was fragile. Other Mongol leaders had realised the advantage of cultivating a relationship with a Tibetan lama and invoking the revered memory of Kubilai Khan, and other Tibetan schools were sending lamas to Mongolia. The Gelug school would have to work fast to make the most of the relationship established by Sonam Gyatso. At first the spotlight fell on a boy from Central Tibet, but though many lamas supported him, Sonam Gyatso's treasurer announced that he had found the real tulku in Mongolia itself. It was a surprising and ingenious move. The Mongolian child was, it transpired, the grandson of Altan Khan.⁵

The political benefits of the Mongolian candidate, who was given the name Yonten Gyatso, were obvious, but the dispute between the factions supporting the two boys resulted in a stalemate that persisted for years.⁶ Yonten Gyatso was educated in Mongolia in preparation for his role, but it was only when a Mongolian delegation travelled to Lhasa to press the case for their boy that the stalemate was broken. In his thirteenth year Yonten Gyatso was brought to Lhasa and officially recognised as the fourth Dalai Lama. With him came a large entourage of Mongol warriors, who camped outside Lhasa, ready to protect their own Dalai Lama.

Now Yonten Gyatso began to take up his responsibilities, travelling from monastery to monastery. He became acutely aware of the political and religious tensions that characterised life in Central Tibet when the king of Tsang came to Lhasa and requested an initiation from him. The Gelug lamas snubbed the king, sending Yonten Gyatso off to Samye, a safe distance from Lhasa. There was also the matter of a congratulatory letter that had come from the office of the Shamar lama of the Karma Kagyu school. The fourth Shamar lama was the personal teacher of the king of Tsang, and probably the most powerful lama in the land. The Gelug lamas could not fully decipher the poetic language of the letter, but they suspected it contained veiled insults to the new Dalai Lama.⁷

It is not clear that Yonten Gyatso was ever comfortable in his role as Dalai Lama in Central Tibet; he was, after all, born and bred a Mongol. But whatever his feelings about position, it had a major impact on Mongol religious politics, as more and more Mongol leaders succeeded in having their children recognised as tulkus. In any case, Yonten Gyatso did not live long enough to settle into his role as the fourth Dalai Lama. Already in 1616, it was apparent that he was not well, and he was taken several times to the hot springs near Lhasa for medical treatment. He died the following year. Yonten Gyatso was only in his mid-twenties, and his achievements were no match for his predecessor's, yet he remains the only non-Tibetan to have held the role of Dalai Lama.

The fourth Dalai Lama, by his nationality alone, brought the Mongols into a close relationship with the Gelug school, which needed their support now more than ever. At the time of the fourth Dalai Lama's death, things were becoming seriously difficult. The ruler of Tsang – he who had recently been snubbed by the Dalai Lama – forced the ruler of U into submission and proclaimed himself the king of Central Tibet. Many of the Gelug monks who took part in the fighting were killed, and the hillside below Drepung monastery was littered with their bodies. This defeat meant that the traditional patron of the Gelug was out of action, replaced by a leader who was a well-known supporter of the Karmapa school. The only event that might tip the balance back in favour of the Gelug was a military intervention by the Mongols.

THE CHOSEN ONE

Were it not for the Mongols, the history of Tibet might have turned out quite differently. The new king of Tsang, Karma Puntsog Namgyal, had united much of Tibet for the first time since the Sakya–Mongol alliance. And unlike the Sakya, he was able to rule without the help of a foreign army. The king was devoted to the Karma Kagyu, but also patronised the Sakya, Nyingma and Jonang schools. For historical reasons he was opposed to the Gelug, but he had begun to show a willingness to accommodate them with his request for an initiation from the Dalai Lama.⁸

Without the Mongols, the Gelug would have had to reconcile themselves to the new king of Tsang in order to survive, becoming one among the many schools supported by the king. The Dalai Lama would accordingly have continued to be one among many esteemed lines of reborn lamas. But there were many among the Gelug who were not satisfied with this role. The

Mongols were there, ready to fight. Their presence would change the course of Tibetan history, and propel the next Dalai Lama to a position of power beyond that of any previous religious figure in Tibet.⁹

At first, it looked as if there might not even be a fifth Dalai Lama. After the death of the fourth Dalai Lama, the king of Tsang, wary of the political potency of the role, had banned the Gelug monks from appointing a new one. Since the death of the previous Dalai Lama, Gelug monks and Mongols had been harassing the Lhasa officials. More and more Mongols were appearing in the streets of Lhasa, and tensions were rising. In 1621, a full-scale battle was only just averted when the Panchen Lama stepped in to mediate. The Panchen Lama, the first in a line of reincarnate lamas who would wield great power in Tibet in the years to come, worked on the king, petitioning him to lift the ban on finding the new Dalai Lama. In fact, a search had been undertaken in secret, and a decision had already been made.¹⁰

The chosen child was from a family of wealthy aristocrats, the Zahor family, who lived in the ancient castle of Tagtse near the tombs of the Tibetan emperors. The boy was a popular candidate, with the lamas of the Karma Kagyu and Jonang schools also hoping to claim him. In the end the argument between these two schools became so bitter that the king of Tsang decided to remove the ban on recognising a new Dalai Lama and let the Gelug school claim the boy for its own, ‘breaking up the dogfight’, as the fifth Dalai Lama later wrote in his autobiography. Even so, the ban was only grudgingly removed in a letter that pointed out that neither Shakyamuni nor Tsongkhapa had given rise to rebirths, and suggesting that the lamas should consider the shame that many tulkus had brought upon their forebears.¹¹

The little boy who was to be the next Dalai Lama was caught up in politics from his earliest years. When he was just three, his father was imprisoned for conspiring against the king of Tsang; he died a few years later, having never set eyes on his son again. The boy’s mother took him to the security of her ancestral family home, another ancient castle, where the boy lived for the next three years. His childhood was spent in relative seclusion, and he was always very excited when monks came to the castle to perform rituals. Afterwards he would make the servants pretend to be monks, and enact his own rituals, banging drums and throwing offering cakes around.

A few years later the lamas of Drepung obtained permission to send a representative to visit the castle. Soon Drepung’s Master of Ten – a title derived from the Sakya curriculum indicating the mastery of ten major treatises – arrived at

the castle and prepared a test to confirm that the boy really was the rebirth of the previous Dalai Lama. In such tests the child is presented with various objects, some of which belonged to the previous incarnation, and some of which did not. If the child consistently chooses the right objects, this is considered proof that he is a genuine rebirth. Unfortunately, the future fifth Dalai Lama utterly failed the test, as he readily admitted in his autobiography: "The Master of Ten showed me the statues and rosaries, but I wasn't able to identify any that I recognised. Then he went to the door and said, "I have great confidence in his recognition." In the end he became my tutor. When I wasn't attentive, he used to say, "Oh why didn't I confess at the time that you couldn't recognise the objects!"¹²

Since the decision had already been made, and the Gelug lamas had worked long and hard to secure the boy for their own school, the tests were in fact a mere formality. In any case, he was an inspired choice, for he proved intelligent, brave and resourceful. The officials now publicly announced his identity. Almost immediately, the boy had to go into hiding. The Mongols in Lhasa insisted that the new Dalai Lama had to be taken to the Mongol stronghold near Lake Kokonor, but the Gelug lamas had no intention of letting him go.

The boy and his mother now fled to the south, where, sequestered for a year, the new Dalai Lama began to learn how to read and write. When the threat of his being spirited away by the Mongols finally receded, he was brought to the Ganden Palace and enthroned. The Panchen Lama ordained him as a monk and gave him the name Losang Gyatso. Thus began a tradition whereby successive rebirths of the Panchen and Dalai Lama acted as each other's preceptors. Now, at the age of ten, the Dalai Lama's serious education in Buddhist philosophy began, along with tutorials in the other accomplishments expected of a learned lama such as astrology, medicine and poetry.

Though he loved studying philosophy, Losang Gyatso suspected that it was not very good for him. He noticed his feelings of superiority when he mastered difficult topics, and worried that he was alienating his learned colleagues with his arrogance. Then, in the middle of these studies, in his nineteenth year, Losang Gyatso met the unconventional abbot of Pabongka monastery.¹³ Paljor Lhundrup was an aristocrat from the Khon family, which provided the heads of the Sakya school. He displayed a lofty disdain for sectarian divisions, becoming both a Gelug monk and a specialist in the Nyingma meditation practices of the Great Perfection. Since Khedrup and other Gelug polemicists had railed against the Great Perfection, Paljor Lhundrup was an unorthodox

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choice as a teacher, but Losang Gyatso was fascinated. In secret, he began to practise the Great Perfection, cultivating a state of awareness transcending all concepts.

Another aspect of the Nyingma lamas that interested the Dalai Lama was their ferocious magical spells. Indeed, these lamas were finding themselves more and more in demand as the threatening presence of the Mongols continued to make itself felt in Central Tibet. One specialist in these spells working for the king of Tsang was known as Sogdogpa, 'Mongol-Repeller'. His spells were credited with sending one Mongol chieftain mad, and calling down lightning which darted around the ranks of his soldiers. But now another Mongol tribe, the Qoshot, was coming to the fore. They were fierce warriors from the western Mongol lands, which had only recently been converted to the Buddhism of the Gelug school, and were feared even more than the eastern Mongols who had dominated life in Central Tibet in recent years.¹⁴

Their leader was Gushi Khan, as fierce in religious devotion as he was in battle. In 1637, he fought his way to the edges of Tibet near Lake Kokonor, and then travelled down to Lhasa to meet the Dalai Lama.¹⁵ The young Losang Gyatso was impressed with the powerful Mongol and chose to interpret his warmongering as a defence of Buddhism, since the Mongol chief he had conquered had been a Daoist. The meeting owed much to the diplomatic efforts of various Gelug lamas, and it went off very successfully. As usual, the visit involved a mutual bestowal of honorary titles: the khan was named 'Dharma King, Upholder of the Teachings', and in turn distributed titles to various attendants of the Dalai Lama. Thus the patron-priest relationship was revived once more. The khan was also given a golden statue of the founder of the Gelug school, Tsongkhapa, a potent reminder of whose interests he would be expected to support. Gushi and his warriors returned to Kokonor, but not for long. Soon Tibet would shudder under the might of a massive Mongol army again.

VICTORY

Losang Gyatso kept his distance from the ins and outs of political life, giving his general right-hand man Sonam Chopel, upon whom he bestowed the title 'Desi', meaning 'governor' a fairly free rein in the political area.¹⁶ The Desi kept up the connection with the khan, and his work paid off. Under cover of protecting Buddhism, Gushi Khan and his Mongol army moved into Eastern

Tibet, where the Gelug school had been struggling recently with a powerful local ruler supporting the Bon religion. Now, the khan sent a letter to the Dalai Lama informing him of his intentions. The Dalai Lama gave his approval, and called in his friend from the Zur clan to help him perform a fierce ritual to assist the Mongol army.

There was another message for the khan, of which the Dalai Lama was unaware. It was always the custom in Tibet to send an oral message along with a written letter, as the written word had little authority on its own. The Desi instructed the Dalai Lama's messenger to tell Gushi Khan to continue with his army into Central Tibet and into the stronghold of the king of Tsang. Bringing the Mongol scourge down on Central Tibet was a bold move, to say the least. The Mongols were known for their brutality towards soldiers and civilians alike. Indiscriminate in battle, they destroyed entire regions in their pursuit of conquest.

So it is hardly surprising that the Dalai Lama later claimed to know nothing of the request to Gushi Khan at the time, though he wrote in his autobiography that he did wonder if 'the tune of a flute had changed to the whistle of an arrow'. In any case, a decision had been made. The young Dalai Lama felt that there was no reason to compete with the other Buddhist schools, and the king of Tsang seemed to have softened his stance towards the Gelug recently. But the memories of the older Gelug lamas went back further, and held more bitterness. They believed that the king of Tsang was never going to give the Gelug school the kind of role in Tibet that it aspired to. Gushi Khan, with his sectarian devotion to the Dalai Lama's school and his willingness to do battle under its banner, offered a means of finally getting the upper hand.¹⁷

The Mongols swept into Central Tibet in 1641, and fought long and hard against the king of Tsang, beating him back to his fortress in Shigatse. A long and brutal siege followed, and the Desi's nerve almost failed him. He went to the Dalai Lama to suggest some kind of mediation, but the Dalai Lama reacted with unexpected anger, declaring that he had never asked the Mongols to invade Central Tibet, but now that the Desi had started this process, he had better see it through. Things had gone too far for reconciliation. A macabre vision had convinced the Dalai Lama that the Mongols would succeed. During a ritual performed for the success of Gushi Khan, he saw a huge human head bearing a terrifying expression in front of the altar. When it opened its mouth, hundreds of smaller heads fell into it, like grains being poured into a bag. It proved an apposite vision: among the enemies of the Gelug the casualties were

enormous. As the king of Tsang's allies surrendered one by one to the Mongols, his options began to run out, and in April 1642 the king himself surrendered. As the monks of the Gelug monasteries hoisted prayer flags over their roofs and burned incense in celebration, the Dalai Lama set out to meet Gushi Khan on the battle plain.¹⁸

It was an encounter heavy with significance. In an elaborate ceremony the khan offered a number of things to the Dalai Lama, including a bell that had belonged to Pagpa and a ritual vessel made of emerald, a jewel prized by the Mongols and Tibetans. The last gift was Tibet itself, an echo of Kubilai Khan's gift of Tibet to Pagpa in the thirteenth century. However, Tibet was not yet entirely under the sway of the Dalai Lama and Gushi Khan. The Encampment, the great tented city that was the stronghold of the Karma Kagyu school, was still a potent force. The Dalai Lama sent a message to the tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje, telling him to sign an agreement that he would not cause any more trouble for the Gelug. The Karmapa refused, protesting that he had never caused any trouble in the past anyway. This failed to convince the Dalai Lama, and soon the Encampment was surrounded by Mongol and Tibetan soldiers. Just before the storm broke, the Karmapa managed to slip away; it was later said that some soldiers saw him passing as a deer, others as a vulture. The soldiers moved in, tearing down the great tents and killing any monks who offered resistance. The Encampment was no more, and the Karmapa was a refugee, fleeing towards the mountains of Bhutan.¹⁹

The remaining supporters of the king of Tsang and the Karma Kagyu regrouped in Kongpo to the southeast, and organised a revolt against the new rulers. By way of response, Gushi Khan and his army, accompanied by the Desi, rode into Kongpo, killing some seven thousand rebels and laying waste to the countryside. Then, deciding that the king of Tsang represented too much of a threat to the new order, even in prison, they killed him too. Utterly demoralised by these events, the remaining rebels surrendered. Now, all over Tibet, Kagyu monasteries were converted into Gelug monasteries, breaking the school's power base, while those Nyingma lamas who had performed rituals to repel the Mongols were thrown into prison.²⁰

The Dalai Lama now turned to another school that had been a thorn in his side for some time, the Jonang. He considered its leader, the charismatic scholar, translator and tantric adept Taranatha, a 'lecherous villain without equal'.²¹ With their patron, the king of Tsang, now dead, there was no obstacle to converting the Jonang monasteries into Gelug monasteries. The Dalai Lama

justified this on religious grounds: the Jonang had been followers of a philosophy known as ‘empty of other’, which the Gelug philosophers found particularly reprehensible. The works of the Jonang were banned, and the order only survived in the far corners of Tibet. A similar fate awaited the works of those Sakya scholars who had criticised Tsongkhapa’s philosophical views. In fact, all the works of the founding fathers of Sakya were banned, a body blow to Sakya scholarship. Printing blocks were locked away, and the voices of dissent silenced.

So it was that, in 1642, the fifth Dalai Lama, Losang Gyatso, became the ruler of all Tibet. His government would be known as the Ganden Palace, after his residence in Drepung monastery; the name would stick down to the twentieth century. Looking for figures on whom to model himself, the Dalai Lama immediately began work on a history of Tibet’s kings, writing of the qualities of the Tibetan tsenpos and the partnership between Kubilai Khan and his priest, Pagpa. At the same time several advisors were suggesting that he build an impressive residence near Lhasa. At first, the Dalai Lama demurred, saying he had no desire for material things of that sort, and, anyway, he disliked the aristocracy of Lhasa, who were haughty and obsessed with making money. One lama argued that, whatever the Dalai Lama’s personal preferences, the Gelug school needed a fortress. Before, they had been forced to flee Lhasa when threatened. Now, if anyone failed to show respect to the teachings of Tsongkhapa, ‘we should not come back without blood on our spears.’²²

A couple of years later, in the spring of 1645, the Dalai Lama left the Ganden Palace and went up the Marpori, the ‘Red Hill’ above Lhasa, where the ruins of the ancient emperor Songtsen Gampo’s palace stood, and began a ritual to prepare the grounds for a great fortress. The wind blew fiercely as the monks assembled with their fluttering flags, parasols and flowers, and the hills resounded with the wail of trumpets and the crashing of drums. At the perimeter Mongolian and Tibetan horsemen observed the proceedings from their saddles. That day, a wealthy woman from Lhasa handed the Dalai Lama an old family heirloom, a statue of Avalokiteshvara that had once belonged to Songtsen Gampo. As the winds died down, a light shower, known in Tibet as ‘a rain of flowers’, fell, and the Dalai Lama declared that Avalokiteshvara, the patron deity of Tibet, had come home at last.²³

Nobody could miss the deliberate symbolism of all this. Today, the Potala Palace, its vast walls towering above Lhasa, is one of the great emblems of Tibet,

just as it was designed to be. For Tibetans, it links the Dalai Lama to the emperors of the imperial period and, beyond them, to Avalokiteshvara himself, lord of compassion and patron of Tibet. The symbolism runs deep. Not only was it built on the ruins of Songtsen Gampo's palace, the Potala is also named after the visionary realm that is the home of Avalokiteshvara. It was built to be the most impressive combination of fortress, royal palace and temple in Tibet, based on the fort of the toppled king of Tsang in Shigatse, but bigger and better.

It is said that seven thousand labourers were brought in to work on its great white walls, and over a thousand artisans carved pillars and beams, painted murals and cast monumental statues. The Tibetan artisans were joined by Nepalese carpenters and sculptors and Chinese painters. After five years of construction, the part of the Potala known as the White Palace was complete, and the Dalai Lama moved in. From this time forward, the idea that the Dalai Lama was an emanation of Avalokiteshvara grew more and more potent as the Dalai Lama assumed the glamour in the Tibetan imagination of the great emperors of the distant past.

THE GREAT FIFTH

Though the Tibetans had little leisure to notice it, China was undergoing a revolution of its own. The Ming dynasty had just about managed to keep the Mongols at bay, only then to be overrun by another band of fearsome horsemen from the steppes, the Manchus. In the summer of 1644, Beijing was taken, and horsemen rode through the city streets in a spree of looting and destruction. Once again, a Chinese dynasty had been toppled by foreign invaders. This new dynasty, who called themselves the Qing, would rule China right up to the early twentieth century.²⁴

When the Dalai Lama heard about the Manchu victory, he sent a polite letter to the new emperor straight away. Significantly, it was signed by both the Dalai Lama and his military protector, Gushi Khan. The Manchus were quite aware of the threat posed by Gushi's fierce Qoshot warriors, and immediately understood by the letter that the Dalai Lama was to be regarded as a serious political player. In fact, the Manchus were perfectly familiar with Tibetan Buddhism. Like the Mongols, they had been inviting Tibetan lamas to their court for some years, and in 1621 the founding father of the Manchu state had appointed a Tibetan lama to the old post of imperial preceptor. He also built a temple to Mahakala, the fierce deity cultivated by Kubilai and his court.²⁵

So the Manchus understood the situation well. By entering into a patron–priest relationship with the fifth Dalai Lama, they would establish a good relationship with Tibet. More importantly, the troublesome Mongol tribes might be persuaded to see the Manchus as genuine successors to Kubilai, and thus valid rulers of Mongolia. In 1648, the first invitation was placed in the Dalai Lama's hands, in the name of the child emperor Shunzhi, who was only ten years old at the time. The Dalai Lama replied politely but made no definite plans; he still had much to do at home. It was not until the third invitation arrived that he finally accepted and started to prepare for the long journey to Beijing.

When the Dalai Lama set off in 1652, it was with a vast entourage of three thousand men, in a style befitting an emperor. Progress was, naturally, slow and stately. Camp would be struck at dawn every morning, and the massive party would then breakfast and travel before stopping for the main midday meal. Then camp would be set up again, with no further travelling that day. The camp itself resembled a moveable court, with the Dalai Lama's own magnificent tent surrounded by those of other dignitaries, radiating outwards to the humble tents of the servants. As he travelled in the mornings, the fifth Dalai Lama reflected on the life of the third Dalai Lama, who had passed the same way on his journey to Mongolia a century earlier. Sitting in his tent in the afternoons, he liked to write, and as the journey progressed he worked on, and completed, a biography of the third Dalai Lama.²⁶

As the party approached Lake Kokonor after eight months on the road, a request arrived from the imperial court: would the Dalai Lama please reduce his entourage to three hundred? The Dalai Lama agreed, but immediately caused a diplomatic incident by inviting the young emperor to come and meet him outside the Great Wall. The emperor wanted to go, and his Manchu advisors could see no reason to decline the invitation. The Chinese advisors, however, saw this as below the dignity expected of a Chinese emperor and counselled against it. The emperor, following his own gut instinct and that of his Manchu advisors, decided to go and meet the Dalai Lama anyway. But then at the last minute the Chinese advisors warned him that the astrological signs were not favourable for such a journey. A shooting star had dared to intrude upon the constellation of the emperor's throne – not a good omen.²⁷

So the young Manchu emperor was persuaded to stay put and receive the Dalai Lama in Beijing. In his place a prince of the royal family rode out with three thousand horsemen and gifts galore to welcome the Dalai Lama and

escort him to Beijing. When the Tibetan party arrived in the capital in the bitter winter of January 1654, the Manchus staged an expensive and elaborate welcoming ceremony, with the two sovereigns seated side by side on thrones before tables laden with a banquet for fifty nobles.

A few weeks later the Dalai Lama wrote a letter to the emperor explaining that he and his companions had been ill due to the climate in Beijing and would like to return to Tibet. Once again the Chinese advisors tried to restrain the young emperor from his initial response, which was to write back asking about the Dalai Lama's health. This, they said, was not in line with protocol. The emperor agreed to follow their counsel, but secretly wrote to the Dalai Lama anyway, confiding that he too had found the climate difficult when he first arrived in Beijing. It was a touching gesture, and a reminder that Beijing was still as foreign to the Manchus as it was to the Tibetans. In truth, the Dalai Lama was probably just looking for an excuse to leave, which he did a couple of months after his arrival in Beijing. After he had departed two Chinese officials rushed to catch up with him and presented him with a seal from the emperor, which gave the Dalai Lama another very wordy honorary title. Once again, the Chinese officials seem to have been scrambling to get the protocol right. The Dalai Lama thought little of it, offering the gold seal to the Jowo statue when he returned to Lhasa.²⁸

Though modern Chinese nationalist historians have taken this visit as marking the submission of the Dalai Lama's government to China, such an interpretation is hardly borne out by either the Tibetan or the Chinese records of the time. The Dalai Lama saw the visit as a confirmation of his new status as 'the sole king of Tibet'. But more than that, he saw the long journey, of which the meeting with the emperor was only a small part, as a chance to show his support for the Gelug monasteries on his route – such as Kumbum, the monastery recently built at Tsongkhapa's birthplace – and to spread the Gelug school's influence in China.²⁹

As for the poor young Manchu emperor, he was still trying to find his way, but it seems that the Manchus mainly saw the Dalai Lama as a powerful ally who wielded a strong influence over the feared Mongols. An alliance with him was an opportunity to bring the Mongols on side by presenting the emperor as (yet another) Kubilai Khan. Several years later, the next Manchu emperor would ask for Tibetan and Mongol troops from the Dalai Lama. The request was politely refused. The emperor's need, and the Dalai Lama's ability to turn him down, are indicative of the relationship between the Tibet and China at the time.³⁰

On his arrival back in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama was welcomed in a style befitting a returning monarch. There seemed to be a growing acceptance of him as the ruler of Tibet, even from those schools that had once opposed the Gelug. The Dalai Lama was himself keen to mend old wounds. He even brought the Kagyu schools on side (to some extent) by appointing two new Kagyu tulkus in Southern Tibet who were second in rank only to the Dalai Lama himself. Yet there was still trouble for the Dalai Lama to deal with in his own school. The transformation of the Dalai Lama from one among several Gelug high lamas to ruler of Tibet could hardly happen without causing some difficulties. One problem took the form of a lama called Drakpa Gyaltsen, one of the candidates passed over in the search for the fifth Dalai Lama who had instead been made abbot of the Upper Chamber at Drepung, the Dalai Lama's own monastery.

Some Gelug lamas, it seems, never accepted that Drakpa Gyaltsen was not the true Dalai Lama. A nascent rebellion within the ranks of the Gelug school itself had coalesced around Drakpa Gyaltsen, who was by all accounts a popular figure, though disliked by the Desi, who referred to him as 'that pot-bellied official', and by the Dalai Lama, who called him 'a fake rebirth'.³¹ Then, soon after the Dalai Lama returned from China, the abbot died in mysterious circumstances. Some said it was after an illness, but others claimed that he had been imprisoned and killed by the Desi. One fanciful story claimed that Drakpa Gyaltsen was awarded a silk scarf after besting the Dalai Lama in a religious debate, and was later found dead with the scarf stuffed down his throat.

Such were the rumours and accusations swirling around the event. Even after the abbot's death, he was clearly still a focus for discontent within the Gelug school, and the Desi banned the search for his reincarnation. In the weeks following the death, monks heard ghostly moaning coming from the mausoleum holding the abbot's remains, and a dramatic decision was taken to tear down the Upper Chamber and get rid of them. They were said to have been flung into a river, where they floated downstream to Dhol Lake, where the abbot's spirit manifested as a vengeful ghost known as Dholgyal, 'the ghost of Dhol Lake'.³²

That was the end of that – for now, at least, as Drakpa Gyaltsen's ghost would come back to haunt the Gelug school. Another problem for the fifth Dalai Lama was the rivalry between the great Gelug monasteries, which seemed to get worse now that they were not fighting with other schools. Tensions focused on the Great Prayer Festival. Responsibility for running the festival had been given to the monks of Sera monastery, and the Dalai Lama was increasingly

concerned by the way they were doing it. Frequent fights were breaking out at this most sacred of festivals, usually over the hierarchy of the seating arrangements. As a result, the Dalai Lama decided to place the festival in the charge of his own monastery, Drepung, instead and wrote a pamphlet explaining why the monks of Sera were not worthy of the task.³³

For the most part, the Dalai Lama increasingly left political matters in the hands of the capable young Desi. He was in essence a man of religion, and spent much of the latter half of his life writing and meditating. He grew fat in his sedentary middle age, and portraits made during or shortly after his lifetime suggest a formidable physical presence. At the heart of his meditation practice was the Great Perfection; in his secret autobiography, an account of his meditation experiences, visions and dreams, he wrote of his many visions of Padmasambhava, patron saint of the Nyingma teachings. Indeed, the Dalai Lama was also spending more and more time with Nyingma lamas, to the chagrin of Gelug lamas of a more sectarian bent.

One of the beneficiaries of the Dalai Lama's generosity was the new Nyingma monastery of Mindroling. The Dalai Lama encouraged the monastery's charismatic leaders, the brothers Terdag Lingpa and Lochen Dharmashri, to gather together as many rare Nyingma teachings as they could find, to keep these ancient traditions from dying out. It is thanks to the support of the fifth Dalai Lama that the Nyingma school preserves many of these traditions to this day. Another result of his preference for the Nyingma was the Nechung temple, which was built near the fifth Dalai Lama's own seat at Drepung, and became the home of the state oracle of Tibet.³⁴

The Dalai Lama also enjoyed spending time with visitors from India who had braved the arduous journey to Lhasa. Despite the decline of Buddhism in India, the birthplace of the Buddha still held a special fascination for educated Tibetans. For those such as the Dalai Lama who had studied Sanskrit, such visits offered a chance to test their linguistic skills with real Brahmin scholars. The Indian visitors were usually rewarded with bags of gold dust, so it is unsurprising that there was a steady stream of Brahmins willing to cross the Himalayas to visit the court of the great lama. Tibet's small Muslim community was also treated well. They were allowed to elect their own council of representatives, and to settle disputes according to Sharia law. Land was also donated so that the Muslims could build a mosque near Lhasa.³⁵

When the fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, he left behind a very different Tibet: united after centuries of civil war, with Lhasa and the Potala Palace – still under

construction – at its heart, and the newest of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelug, in an unassailable position. Though details would change, this is essentially the Tibet that endured through to the mid-twentieth century. The Tibet that existed before was very much the creation of the fifth Dalai Lama and his well-chosen right-hand men, which is why he came to be known to all Tibetans simply as ‘the Great Fifth’.

THE POET

The death of the fifth Dalai Lama left a gaping hole at the centre of the newly unified Tibet. The responsibility for dealing with this potential calamity fell to the Desi, Sangye Gyatso. Barely thirty years old, he had only been in the job three years. He had been such a favourite of the ageing Dalai Lama that it had been rumoured that he was his illegitimate child. Now he was on his own and, incredibly, he found himself essentially the ruler of all Tibet. Perhaps it was to protect his own position, or perhaps the fragile stability of Tibet as a whole, that he undertook the most ambitious act of deception in Tibet’s history.

For an astonishing fifteen years the Desi kept the Dalai Lama’s death a secret. Apart from a few close attendants, he told everybody that the Dalai Lama had gone on an extended retreat and did not wish to be disturbed. At first, it was enough to make sure that one of the attendants went into the Dalai Lama’s room occasionally, ringing bells and sounding drums as if a meditation practice were in progress. When the Dalai Lama was required to appear on major public occasions, the Desi placed his ceremonial robes upon the throne, forcing the Tibetans to accept this merely symbolic presence instead. It was a different matter when the Mongols came to town: they were rather more insistent on seeing the Dalai Lama in person. Sangye Gyatso was well aware that the Mongols were the military backbone of his Tibetan government, so he found an old monk with a passing resemblance to the Dalai Lama. The monk was dressed up and seated on the Dalai Lama’s throne for the audience, and, fortunately for Sangye Gyatso, conducted himself plausibly enough during the polite ceremony to convince the Mongols.

After this narrow escape, Sangye Gyatso kept the old monk within the Dalai Lama’s quarters, to be brought out whenever it was necessary. The monk did not readily accept imprisonment in another person’s role and tried to escape, for which Sangye Gyatso had him beaten; later the Desi resorted to bribing the old monk to stay. In the meantime, the search for the next Dalai Lama had to

be carried out in the utmost secrecy, far from Lhasa, in the recently conquered Mon region, near the borders of Bhutan. Bhutan had been a stubborn enemy of the Dalai Lama's government, and its densely packed hills and valleys had foiled the Mongol troops that he sent to conquer it. These borderlands were of strategic value and some saw the search for the new Dalai Lama here as a strategic choice. The Gelug school was only supported by one of the local noble families and it was a boy from this family who was recognised as the new Dalai Lama.³⁶

At first there were doubts about the chosen candidate. When the Desi's envoys carried out their tests, the child seemed confused, and failed to recognise the fifth Dalai Lama's rosary. When the party returned with this news, Sangye Gyatso was displeased and sent it straight back to try again. This time the envoys came back with reports of success. The boy and his parents were swiftly transferred to a secret location, where the child was to stay for twelve years, being intensively educated in the vast array of texts that the Great Fifth had mastered. He was also allowed to read the secret autobiography of his predecessor, in the hope that the accounts of visions contained therein would awaken memories of his previous life.

Back in Lhasa, Sangye Gyatso had much more on his mind than just the child Dalai Lama, as he attempted to keep tabs on every aspect of government. It was even rumoured that his omnipresence extended to the streets of Lhasa, that he dressed as a commoner and started conversations with ordinary people to find out what they thought of the Dalai Lama's long 'retreat' or of the Desi himself. His great secret, the death of the fifth Dalai Lama, was kept until 1696, a year after the completion of his most cherished project, the Red Palace of the Potala. When the Dalai Lama's passing was announced it did not cause a great stir in Lhasa. Perhaps most people had guessed the truth already, and perhaps the promise of the enthronement of the new Dalai Lama, now sixteen, was excitement enough to counter the deception that had gone before it. The sixth Dalai Lama was quite impressive: handsome, intelligent and well educated (albeit in secret) in preparation for his role, he seemed a suitable object for the reverence of the Tibetan people.

His arrival in Lhasa was the most spectacular public occasion in years. Thousands gathered to watch as the Desi and Lajang Khan, the new leader of the Qoshot Mongols, rode out to meet the new Dalai Lama. The boy was overwhelmed, and tears ran down his face when he saw the Desi and the khan riding towards him with their great entourage. The Desi, too, was overwhelmed

by this, the most important moment of his career, and cried unashamedly. Next, the Panchen Lama arrived to give the boy his novice ordination, and the name Tsangyang Gyatso, 'Ocean of Divine Song'. The new Dalai Lama burst into tears again during this solemn ceremony. At last the Desi had his new Dalai Lama in place. But he was not able to breathe easy yet; his dark secret had reached the ears of the Manchus. The ruler of China was now the Kanxi emperor, the first truly great Manchu ruler. An astute politician, Kanxi feared the power the Tibetans wielded when backed by their Mongol allies. Hence he now acted with deadly cunning to destroy this alliance by convincing the Mongols that the concealment of the fifth Dalai Lama's death was an act of betrayal by the Desi, who just wanted Tibet for himself. In any case, the Mongols did not share the Tibetans' willingness to accept the new teenage Dalai Lama.

Poor Sangye Gyatso was himself having trouble with the new Dalai Lama. He was acting as personal tutor to the boy, giving him a religious as well as a political education. The Panchen Lama was also called upon to offer instruction, maintaining the teacher–student relationship that is, in theory, supposed to exist between all Panchen and Dalai Lamas. But the sixth Dalai Lama showed a worrying lack of interest in his studies. At first he had appeared to accept his sudden transformation into a public figure, graciously greeting the hundreds of visitors who travelled to meet him from as far away as Beijing and Kathmandu. But increasingly, as he grew in confidence, his interests turned elsewhere. He seemed much more enthusiastic about archery, skipping his lessons whenever there was a contest to watch.

Fearing that the young Dalai Lama was slipping through his fingers, the Desi tried to tighten his grasp by pressuring him to take his full monastic vows. But the Dalai Lama dug his heels in. Despite the pleas and threats of the Desi, he simply refused. The Panchen Lama was due to come up to Lhasa and officiate over the ceremony, but instead the Dalai Lama rode to Tashilhunpo and renounced his novice vows. This was a disaster. The Gelug school had placed particular emphasis on the monastic vows. All of its reincarnate lamas were monks, and the Dalai Lama was by far the most important of them.

But as he approached adulthood, the Dalai Lama became quite sure that he could not be a monk. This was becoming depressingly clear to the Desi as well. The Dalai Lama had started going out at night, and was seen drinking in bars, and staggering drunkenly through the streets singing with friends. He kept a tent in an encampment near Lhasa, to which he brought back the young women that he picked up on these excursions. The Desi made one last

desperate attempt to change the young man's mind. He asked the abbots of all the major monasteries to speak to the Dalai Lama and persuade him to keep, at least, his novice vows. But though the Dalai Lama's voice became quieter and quieter with each reply to these harangues, he would not budge from his resolve.

With a new sense of freedom the Dalai Lama began to dress like a wealthy nobleman, even within the confines of the Potala, wearing blue silk clothes and jewellery and his hair long. He also started writing poetry, which was first shared with his friends, and later became well known more generally in Lhasa. The verses are celebrated nowadays as rare examples of Tibetan love poetry, but they also hint at the tensions inherent in the Dalai Lama's position.³⁷ In one poem he writes:

I went to see a qualified lama,
And asked him to guide my mind.
But my mind wouldn't stay put;
It kept wandering off to my love.

In others, he laments the pains of love affairs:

First, don't even look;
There's no point losing your heart.
Second, don't get too close;
There's no point being heartsick.

A diarist met the sixth Dalai Lama when he was staying at a village outside Lhasa. The young man was surrounded by his entourage, who were all drunk and behaving shockingly. Many of them could not even stand. But the Dalai Lama, by contrast, seemed unaffected by the large quantities of alcohol he was quaffing, and sat writing compositions and singing in spite of the chaos around him. The Desi thought that the trouble stemmed from the bad company that the Dalai Lama kept. He therefore arranged the assassination of one young man who was close to the Dalai Lama and was suspected of procuring women for him. Late at night, when the Dalai Lama, his friend and an attendant were returning to the Potala from a night on the town, the assassin struck. But the three had swapped clothes, and the assassin's knife went into the back of the servant. The Desi's involvement could never be proven, but after this

event poison seeped into the relationship between the Dalai Lama and his Desi.

At least Sangye Gyatso could console himself with his scholarly work, in which he increasingly immersed himself, handing on the role of Desi to his son. He wrote the definitive biography of the fifth Dalai Lama, concentrating on religious achievements and promoting his status as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara. He also had a golden mausoleum built for the Great Fifth. It was clearly his hope that the memory of the last Dalai Lama might eclipse the terrible behaviour of the present one. In his writings, Sangye Gyatso achieved what he could never quite manage in politics; ranging across diverse subjects such as medicine, astrology and calligraphy, his works set a standard for Tibetan arts and culture that remains in place to the present day.

KIDNAPPED

Despite his semi-retirement, Sangye Gyatso continued to meddle in Tibetan politics, with increasingly disastrous consequences. Since the death of the fifth Dalai Lama, he had become accustomed to wielding power with few obstructions. Even the Mongols, after the death of Gushi Khan, had not had much say in Tibetan affairs. But Gushi Khan's grandson, Lajang Khan, had ambitions to turn the fortunes of the Qoshot Mongols around, and to reclaim his grandfather's title as 'king of Tibet'. Such an ambition ran up against Sangye Gyatso's disdain for Mongol involvement in Tibet. Once again, he stooped to the dark arts of assassination, plotting to have Lajang Khan poisoned. And, once again, he failed.

Afterwards, relations between Lajang Khan and Sangye Gyatso went from bad to worse. Finally, a council was convened to sort out the dispute, a personal enmity that threatened the fabric of Tibet's new government. The council was headed by the sixth Dalai Lama, though he sat back and played only a small part in the negotiations. It was decided at last that Sangye Gyatso would genuinely go into retirement this time, and stop trying to run Tibet from behind the scenes. For his part, Lajang Khan would return to the Qoshot homeland in the region of Lake Kokonor, though he was allowed to retain the title 'king of Tibet'.

But the Tibetans, and Sangye Gyatso in particular, seem to have underestimated quite how determined Lajang Khan was to wrench back control of Tibet. He agreed to the council's resolutions and rode north. But in the plains

he gathered his soldiers around him and marched south again, to Lhasa. As news of the Mongol advance spread through the panicked city, Sangye Gyatso gathered his troops. It was futile. With characteristic ferocity the Mongols destroyed the Tibetan army.

So it was exile for Sangye Gyatso. He was sent to his own estate to ponder the wreck of the great Tibetan regime that he had inherited. Not that he had much time to reflect, for he was summoned back from exile by one of Lajang Khan's wives, a Tibetan noblewoman, now a commander herself who rode at the head of one of the Mongol battalions. Some said that she had been forced to marry the khan after Sangye Gyatso had lost her in a game of chess. Whatever the reason, she hated the former Desi. When the sixth Dalai Lama heard that Sangye Gyatso was being taken to see this woman he suspected the worst, and sent a delegation of respected monks from Drepung to plead for his life. But the monks were too late. At the noblewoman's camp they found the decapitated body of Sangye Gyatso, still warm.

As for Lajang Khan, he now had the whole of Tibet in his sights. If his grandfather had been content to regard his 'king of Tibet' title as mainly an honorific, this was out of a genuine devotion for the fifth Dalai Lama. Lajang felt no such devotion for the new Dalai Lama. Though he had spent time in Lhasa, and knew the young man well, he now saw him as a rival. He knew that people loved the sixth Dalai Lama: his increasingly outrageous behaviour had endeared him to the Tibetans. And he knew could never be a genuine king of Tibet with that charismatic figure on the scene.

So Lajang sent a letter to the Kanxi Emperor, asking whether he would have the support of the Manchus if he deposed the Dalai Lama. Certainly, came the emperor's reply, send him to me in Beijing, and I will decide what is to be done with him. The next step was to get some kind of support from the Gelug establishment. Lajang met with the abbots of the leading monasteries, and tried to get their consent to his plan to depose the Dalai Lama. Whether from fear of the khan, or disillusionment with the Dalai Lama, the abbots capitulated and signed a statement that the essence of enlightenment no longer dwelt in this Dalai Lama.

This bit of spiritual legalese was justification enough for Lajang. He sent his strongmen to the Potala, where they seized the Dalai Lama and took him to the Mongol encampment outside Lhasa. As news of his kidnapping spread through Lhasa, hundreds of angry monks and laypeople gathered, and Mongol horsemen had to form a barrier around the camp. After a few tense days, the

Mongols were ready to take the Dalai Lama to Beijing, at which point Lajang Khan made a declaration to the angry crowds that this man, Tsangyang Gyatso, was not the true rebirth of the fifth Dalai Lama, and the party left for Beijing.

Incredibly, the monks of Drepung ambushed the party as it was departing from Lhasa and managed to rescue the Dalai Lama. They brought him to his seat in Drepung monastery, where they consulted the esteemed oracle of Nechung, who gave a very clear reply that this was the genuine sixth Dalai Lama. Steeled in their resolve, the Drepung monks decided to fight to the death to save their Dalai Lama from being taken away to Beijing. It didn't take long for Lajang to react. Though Drepung was almost a fortress, it could not withstand a Mongol onslaught. Cannon fire bombarded the Dalai Lama's residence, and Mongol horsemen rode into the monastery's grounds. The monks fought hard but were no match for the Mongols. The sixth Dalai Lama saw what was happening and decided to give himself up to Lajang. He left his palace with a few devoted friends who refused to let him go on his own.

It was a brave act of selflessness for the Dalai Lama, perhaps a repudiation of the abbots' cowardly disavowal of him. His friends were cut down where they stood, while the Dalai Lama himself was scooped up and carried away in haste. So began the long, hard journey to Beijing. Winter was approaching and the Mongols rode fast, without the frequent stops and long interludes that characterised the usual progress of Tibetan high lamas to China. Still, when news of his coming reached the local towns, thousands of people gathered to see the Dalai Lama and receive his blessing.

But it was apparent that the Dalai Lama was not at all well. As the Mongol escort insisted on maintaining the punishing pace of the ride, the Dalai Lama became more and more ill. When the party came to the edge of the Mongol homeland, he finally insisted that he could not travel any more, telling his escort that the next time they crossed this way they would ride over his bones. Seeing that he really did seem close to death, the Mongols set up camp by one of the region's cold blue lakes. Despite medicine and prayers, the Dalai Lama died on the lake shore. It was a chilly November day in 1706. He was twenty-four.

The body was taken to the nearby city of Xining, where it was laid in honour for several days while people came to pay their respects. When the Kanxi Emperor heard of the death of his prisoner, he sent word that the body should not be accorded any respect, but should rather be desecrated and discarded. Fortunately, by the time this order came back to Xining, the body had already

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been cremated. The troubled life of the sixth Dalai Lama was over. As for the next incarnation, one of the recently deceased Dalai Lama's poems seemed to point the way:

Little white crane,
Lend me your wings.
I'll not go far away,
Just round Litang and back.

A few years later, the seventh Dalai Lama would be recognised in the Eastern Tibetan district of Litang. But many Tibetans found the death of their beloved Tsangyang Gyatso difficult to believe. Some said he had been poisoned. More fancifully, rumours circulated that he had actually escaped his captors and was travelling in disguise through Tibet. Many years later a book was published called *The Secret Life of Tsangyang Gyatso*, recounting the many adventures of the sixth Dalai Lama in later life, and how he finally settled down as an abbot in Amdo, where he died some forty years after his reported death on the lake shore.³⁸

It is an unlikely tale, and the brief life of the Dalai Lama is better summarised in another poem, one that he might have written on his last journey:

Death, mirror of our actions,
Ruler of the underworld:
Nothing went right in this life;
Please let it go right in the next.

But the life of the next Dalai Lama would not be free of trouble either.

THE PAWN

Lajang Khan had finally got hold of the prize. He was now the uncontested king of Tibet. But how long could it last? Sticking to his denunciation of the deceased Tsangyang Gyatso as a fake Dalai Lama, he now produced a monk of the same age and declared that this was the real sixth Dalai Lama. This alternative Dalai Lama was met with indifference by the Tibetan people; it was widely held that he was in fact Lajang Khan's own son. The Tibetan aristocracy was split along regional lines, as usual, with the nobles of Tsang generally

supportive of their new Mongol king, and those of U generally hostile to him. It was a tense period.³⁹

Lajang also had the emperor of China breathing down his neck. He knew that there were many Mongols who disliked his puppet Dalai Lama as much as the Tibetans and would happily see him toppled, so he was quite dependent on the support of the Kanxi Emperor. A Manchu assistant was sent to keep an eye on Lajang. This official only spent a year in Tibet before his post was discontinued, but it was long enough for him to carry out his main task; to gather enough information to draw a map of Tibet. The official returned from his Tibetan sojourn with a bundle of sketches, which were handed over to the Jesuit priest Father Regis. The Jesuits used the sketches in the atlas of China that they presented to the Kanxi Emperor. When Kanxi's atlas was published in 1718, Tibet was included in the map of China, a sign of things to come.

Meanwhile, reports were arriving in Lhasa that the rebirth of Tsangyang Gyatso had been identified in Litang, far away in Eastern Tibet. At first Lajang just ignored this distant development, but when he heard that other Mongols, his own relations who were jealous of his new power, were declaring their support for the boy, he sent his men to Litang. Fortunately the seventh Dalai Lama's father, a shrewd political operator, fled with his son to the kingdom of Derge, where Tibetan and Mongol soldiers could protect the boy. Meanwhile, the emperor was keeping his eye on this new Dalai Lama too. He could be a useful pawn in the elaborate strategic game that he was playing with the Mongols and Tibet.

The troubling appearance of a new Dalai Lama meant that the lamas of the Gelug school were even less inclined to support Lajang. There was also the matter of the latter's friendly relations with a group of Christian missionaries. The Jesuit mission led by Father Ippolito Desideri arrived in Lhasa in 1716, three and a half years after he had received the blessing of Pope Clement XI in Rome. Lajang was happy to talk to Desideri, who even dared hope that the khan might be converted to Christianity, writing: 'Though intellectually so acute, he was docile, not clinging obstinately to the errors of his sect, but admitting the truth of some of the points elucidated, and then assuring me that when absolutely convinced of the falsity of their religion and the truth of our Holy Faith he would not only conform to the laws of Jesus Christ but insist on his court and kingdom doing likewise.'

Most likely the khan was being polite, and Desideri wildly optimistic. There had been Christian missions in Tibet since the previous century, and there

would be more in the future, but by any standard they were all failures, managing only a handful of conversions and leaving little behind them when they departed again for Europe. Desideri was the most intellectually acute of these priests, and his writings remain among the very best accounts of Tibet by an outsider. He cast an occasionally sympathetic and almost objective eye over the culture and religion of the Tibetans in Lhasa, although he was always puzzled by the Tibetans' adherence to their strange religion. Having studied Tibetan works of philosophy, he understood something that his brothers had not. The religion of the Buddha was not merely a form of idolatry, but something even worse – atheism. This pernicious doctrine the good father could only rationalise as a devious stratagem of the Devil himself: 'The other capital error, source of all the false dogmas believed in by this people, is the absolute and positive denial of the existence of any God or of any uncreate and independent Being. The infernal enemy, with subtle artifice, has so adorned this monstrosity as to make it appear to them of the most sublime importance, the final step towards perfection, and the only path leading to eternal bliss.'⁴⁰

Even if Lajang Khan showed only polite interest in Desideri and his religion, this was another reason for the Gelug lamas to distrust him. He had shown a cavalier disregard for their institution of the Dalai Lamas; might he now even abandon the Buddhist path entirely? As a result, the lamas of the great Gelug monasteries, Drepung, Sera and Ganden, now began to plot the downfall of Lajang. Their great ally in this plan was the king of the Junghar Mongols, a rising power in Mongolia and a thorn in the side of the Kanxi Emperor. He was also a Buddhist devoted to the Gelug school and supportive of the exiled seventh Dalai Lama. As he gathered his troops for an invasion, the Gelug lamas of Lhasa sent young monks north to train as soldiers.

The Junghars rode to Lhasa in 1717, where Lajang's army, headed by a very capable general of whom we will hear more later, held them off for two months. But there was also a propaganda war going on. The Junghars claimed to be bringing the seventh Dalai Lama home; in fact, they had not yet managed to get hold of him, but this rumour was nonetheless enthusiastically spread about by the lamas of the Gelug monasteries. Though the Panchen Lama remained loyal to Lajang, popular support among the monks, and most of the laypeople too, now dwindled to nothing.

With the Junghars now at the walls of Lhasa itself, it was treachery that finally brought about the fall of Lajang. On a dark November night, ladders were dropped down the fortified walls. The Junghars climbed up them and

massacred the remaining troops loyal to Lajang. The khan himself fled to the Potala. He was an old man now, overweight and a heavy drinker. His days of heroic deeds in battle were long gone; he knew that the Potala could not hold out against the Junghars, and that if he stayed everyone in the palace would be killed.

So Lajang decided to leave the Potala in the dead of night with just three companions; the rest of the inhabitants were to go in a different direction. The Junghars soon discovered his escape and rode after the khan. As he approached a ditch in the road, his horse took fright and fell down, taking its rider with it. Two of the fugitives had matchlock guns which they fired at their pursuers. When their ammunition ran out, they used the guns as clubs as the Junghars descended upon them. Lajang fought with his sword, cutting off the arm of one of his attackers, before he was fatally stabbed and fell down dead.

Now the Junghars had Lhasa in their hands. For the Gelug lamas who had let them in, the result was a bitter disappointment. The seventh Dalai Lama was still in Eastern Tibet, as far away as ever, while the Junghars proved cruel overlords. As Desideri wrote, the Junghars ‘during the whole of 1718 did nothing but practise unheard-of atrocities on the people of the kingdom.’ One ugly activity brought to Tibet by the Junghars was religious persecution. Loyal to the Dalai Lama and the Gelug school, they were fiercely hostile to the Nyingma.⁴¹

Riding without compunction into the precincts of the Nyingma monasteries in Central Tibet, including the great Mindroling to which the fifth Dalai Lama had given so much support, the Junghars cut down the monks. Nyingma abbots, including Lochen Dharmashri of Mindroling, one the greatest scholars of his time, were executed. The Nyingma monasteries, though politically no threat, were attacked for their acceptance of lamas who were not monks and for their use of fierce magical rituals. Statues of Padmasambhava were a particular target. The Junghars even had the temerity to teach virtue to the Gelug school. They formed an inquisition into the great Gelug monasteries, expelling anyone who was not a monk, and any lamas whose behaviour was called into doubt. It soon became clear that these new Mongol rulers were far worse than the last ones. The Junghar occupation of Lhasa had become intolerable for everyone. The Tibetans lacked the fighting power to oust them, but help was on its way.

Far away in Beijing, the Kanxi Emperor had received a letter from Lajang Khan urgently requesting help against the Junghars. Unaware of the khan’s

death in the interim, he began amassing his troops. When he did hear that Lajang was dead and that the Junghars had taken Lhasa, the emperor realised that he would have to mount an invasion rather than merely a relief operation. Perhaps it was time to bring his pawn into play. The emperor therefore made enquiries about the seventh Dalai Lama. The boy was now twelve, and it was his father who negotiated with the emperor. Yes, they would be willing to come to Lhasa with the Manchu army, if the seventh Dalai Lama finally received official recognition.

So the emperor despatched a golden seal written in Manchu, Tibetan and Chinese to the Dalai Lama and his father, and they left with the army for Lhasa. The Junghar presence in Tibet had already degenerated into groups of armed brigands roaming the land; these were easily picked off by the Manchu army. In October 1720, a great procession entered the ruined Potala; comprising Manchus, Chinese, Mongols and Tibetans, it was headed by the young seventh Dalai Lama. Thanks to the Kanxi Emperor, the Mongol threat had been banished and the line of the Dalai Lamas had been preserved. But at what price?

THE POLITICIAN

Pholhane was an aristocrat from one of the Tsang families who had supported Lajang Khan. In his youth he had received his religious education from the Panchen Lama on the one hand and from the Nyingma monks of Mindroling on the other. He then entered into the usual career of a young nobleman in government, working as an accountant, next as a judge, and then as an officer in Lajang's army. He so impressed Lajang that he was made a general, and in this role he staged a spirited, though ultimately futile defence of Lhasa against the Junghars. After the fall of the city, Pholhane plotted the Junghars' overthrow with other Tibetan nobles. Though his plan came to nothing, he would be an obvious choice for political office when the government of Tibet was reconstituted. When the Kanxi Emperor's army arrived victorious in Tibet, it was welcomed by the Tibetans. There were no uprisings, and there was no need to send the army out to subdue other districts. After the shame of Lajang Khan's puppet Dalai Lama and the atrocities of the Junghar occupation, this well-disciplined Manchu army bringing the real Dalai Lama back to the Potala was widely welcomed.

So it was that the Manchu emperor came to have a free hand in remodelling Tibet. He poured money into rebuilding the Potala, not just repairing the

damage caused by the Junghars, but making it even more glorious than before. At the same time he radically reorganised the country, bringing most of Eastern Tibet under direct Manchu administration. Amdo was now to be part of the province of Qinghai, and most of Kham was absorbed into the province of Sichuan. This was a major change, effectively an annexation of part of the Tibetan cultural area to the Manchu empire, but no protest emerged from the ragged remains of the Central Tibetan government.

Once the army had done its work, the emperor stationed a garrison in Lhasa, and reformed the Tibetan government as a council of three Tibetan ministers. The Dalai Lama was not allowed a role in government (though his father soon became a very influential figure). As for Pholhane, though not on the council, he was widely respected and took a major role in shaping the new Tibet. One of the first motions he put before the council was to fund the repair of the hundreds of Nyingma monasteries and temples attacked by the Junghars. But in this he met deep opposition, not least from the Dalai Lama and his father.⁴²

Then, in 1722, the Kanxi Emperor died. The Dalai Lama, who owed his position to the emperor, personally performed the extensive funeral rituals. But things now changed. The new Manchu emperor, Yongzheng, much less keen than his father on building an empire, immediately ordered the Manchu garrison to leave Lhasa. The Tibetans would have to stand on their own, and indeed they did. Pholhane demonstrated his mettle yet again when he led a successful military expedition to quell a Mongol rebellion. Yet despite his loyalty to the Manchu emperor, Pholhane also showed that he was willing to challenge his orders. When an edict arrived from the new emperor ordering the closure of all Nyingma monasteries, nobody in the court dared to speak out against it except Pholhane. It seems that certain Gelug lamas at the Manchu court were pursuing their own sectarian agendas, and the emperor may have been alarmed by stories of the fierce magic wielded by Nyingma adepts. But Pholhane stood up before the envoys and made an impassioned plea for tolerance, reminding them that Tsongkhapa, the fifth Dalai Lama and the first Panchen Lama had all showed great respect towards the Nyingma. Pholhane's plea was so eloquent that the Manchu messengers made no objection; in fact, his words were drafted into a letter to Yongzheng and the order was rescinded.⁴³

The council that now ruled Tibet was in the process of tearing itself apart. Formed of nobles from different parts of the country with different vested

interests, it was headed by Kangchene, a hot-tempered, arrogant and overbearing figure who could arouse strong hatred. But Kangchene had the full support of Pholhane – both had served under Lajang and fought against the Junghars, and both believed that a strong Manchu presence was the best thing for Tibet. The other two chief ministers were both anti-Manchu and personally disliked Kangchene. Frustrated and angry, they hatched a plot to assassinate him.

The day agreed upon by the plotters was in August 1727, when the council was sitting in its office in Lhasa. Kangchene, completely unaware of the plot, smiled and joked with his fellow council members as one of his attendants handed him a letter. This was the sign. As Kangchene bent to read the letter, a minor official grabbed his long hair and pulled back his head. The other two ministers drew knives from their clothes and advanced, while their attendants burst through the door with swords; Kangchene was stabbed hundreds of times. He dragged himself towards the door, but died on the floor as the blades continued to fall upon him. The plotters then captured Kangchene's wife and sister-in-law, and killed them too. Anyone who had shown loyalty to Kangchene was killed or thrown in prison.

Fortunately for Pholhane, his wife had recently become seriously ill and he had left the council to be at her bedside on his estate. While performing Buddhist rituals for her, he received a mysterious letter from one of the Dalai Lama's tutors, written in the form of a prophecy but clearly advising him to stay away from Lhasa. He consulted the Nyingma lamas, who also spoke mysteriously of bloody visions. When news of the coup came to Pholhane he knew the plotters would soon be after him as well. He therefore left his estate and began to raise an army. The Panchen Lama, whose monastery was nearby, tried to dissuade Pholhane from this course of action, but his arguments met with an angry response. The ensuing civil war lasted nearly a year.

In the end, Pholhane was victorious thanks to his brilliant strategic mind and his diplomatic abilities, which brought a Mongol clan into his service. Once again the war ended with a siege of the Potala. This time, the ministers gave themselves up, and at the request of the Dalai Lama their lives were spared. Shortly afterwards, another army sent by the Manchu emperor arrived. Together Pholhane and the Manchu envoys reorganised the government of Tibet again. First of all, the emperor insisted that the Dalai Lama should leave Lhasa. Though he had played no active role in the uprising, he was considered too dangerous as a rallying point for anti-Manchu rebels.

So with the greatest courtesy it was ‘suggested’ that the Dalai Lama should travel to Eastern Tibet, for the good of the people. The Dalai Lama ended up in a military garrison near his home town of Litang. His father, correctly seen as the real troublemaker, was brought before the emperor chained to his two wives. But this wily politician made the best of the situation, and was actually given an honorary title before being released to rejoin his son. With the Dalai Lama out of the picture, the Manchu envoys now elevated the Panchen Lama, granting him sovereignty over Tsang and Western Tibet in an attempt to create a political counterweight to the Dalai Lama. The emperor also appointed two Manchu officials, called *ambans*, to live in Lhasa and keep an eye on the Tibetan government. At the head of this new government was Pholhane, now widely regarded as king of Tibet.⁴⁴

Pholhane’s rule, which lasted until 1747, was peaceful compared with what had gone before, and he is remembered as one of Tibet’s great statesmen. Tibetans remember him too for his sponsorship of the first printed edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, produced at Nartang monastery. Pholhane was wise enough to allow the Dalai Lama to come back to Lhasa after four years in exile. The Dalai Lama returned to great celebrations and elaborate ceremonies, but he was now under firm orders to keep to religious matters. It was the seventh Dalai Lama’s last move across the chessboard. He would not leave Central Tibet again. As for his father, that ingenious and troublesome man had to agree to live in a village three days’ journey from Lhasa, and to visit his son just once a year.

In all of his struggles, his eventual rise to the position of sole ruler of Tibet, and his subsequent steady hand on the reins of power, Pholhane made careful decisions, balancing the needs of Tibet against the wishes of the Manchu court. His judgement, it seems, never failed him, except in one crucial matter: the question of who would succeed him. Like many before him, Pholhane wanted to found a dynasty; also like many others, he seriously overestimated the ability of his chosen heir to carry on his work. When Pholhane’s son Gyurme Namgyal stepped into his father’s shoes as *de facto* king of Tibet, he made a serious *faux pas* straight away. He managed to arouse the suspicion of the Manchu emperor by despatching a letter stating that he wanted to send monks to Eastern Tibet, now under Manchu rule, to give the Gelug school a more prominent role there. The emperor rightly saw this as a ploy to manufacture a greater political role for himself in Eastern Tibet, and refused. He also sent a trusted advisor to act as *amban* and report on the new Tibetan ruler. The

amban's report was not at all favourable: Gyurme Namgyal was apparently an obstinate man, an unpopular ruler, and the Dalai Lama could not stand the sight of him.

Things quickly went from bad to worse, as Gyurme Namgyal had his own brother assassinated. When the respected minister Doring Pandita tried to reason with him, Gyurme Namgyal grabbed a spear and threw it at him. When it missed and wounded a horse instead, he grabbed another, and missed again, this time killing an attendant. It seems that this new king of Tibet suffered from serious mental instability, and many wondered where his volatile temper would lead their land. Finally, the Manchu ambans, fearing for their position under this wild young ruler, decided to take matters into their own hands.

They invited Gyurme Namgyal to their residence, and while one of the ambans reproached him bitterly for his behaviour, the other drew his sword and ran him through. The ambans quickly sent a message to Doring Pandita, telling him what they had done, and that he should assume power straight away. This came as a complete surprise to the minister, who went to confer with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. But events elsewhere were moving fast. As news spread through Lhasa of the murder of their sovereign by the ambans, an angry crowd gathered. Gyurme Namgyal might not have been popular, but he was a Tibetan, and his murderers were Manchus.

There was no dissuading the mob. The Dalai Lama sent a message, but it was ignored. The ambans' residence was set on fire, and when the ambans emerged, they were attacked. They fought hard, but could not win against the mob. One amban died fighting, the other committed suicide. The upshot was inevitable: the Manchu emperor sent an army into Lhasa again. The ringleaders of the mob that had killed the ambans were caught and publicly killed in the cruel and slow execution known as 'death by a thousand cuts'. The emperor was minded to appoint new ambans to head the Tibetan government, a move that would have transformed Tibet into a colony of China. But he saw that this would be difficult to achieve and would only infuriate the Tibetans, so it was decided instead to let the Dalai Lama resume his old role as the head of the Tibetan government. Under him, a council of four ministers (two monks and two laymen) called the Kashag would take care of the day-to-day running of the country. At the age of forty-three, the Dalai Lama having for so long been a pawn of the Manchus, now at last came to wield real power.

This reorganisation of the Tibetan government lasted for some two hundred years, until the Communist takeover in the 1950s. It allowed the Manchus to

include Tibet in the outer reaches of their empire without having to administer it directly. Tibet would have its own government, religion, language and culture. No taxes would be paid to China, and the ambans were to play only a minor role in Tibetan politics, largely functioning as observers who reported (not always honestly) back to the emperor. And while he was not an ambitious leader like the Great Fifth, or a popular figure like the sixth, the seventh Dalai Lama proved equal to his new role as head of the Tibetan government. This may have come as a surprise to some, but he had obviously learned some useful lessons from his politically astute father.

Still, the seventh Dalai Lama's power was very limited compared with that of the Great Fifth. The sixth Panchen Lama now ruled over Tsang and much of Western Tibet. Eastern Tibet had been annexed by the Manchus and on the ground was ruled by independent kingdoms such as Derge and Nangchen. The Dalai Lama's domain was thus effectively limited to the Central Tibetan region of U. Even here, the next five Dalai Lamas would not wield any real power; this which would be in the hands of regents, abbots and ministers. And they would be under the supervision – in theory at least – of the Manchu emperor. Not until the twentieth century would a Dalai Lama once again reign supreme in Tibet. In the meantime, the Tibetans would have to deal with changes that were occurring all over the world, as they found themselves precariously balanced between emerging and voracious new empires.



7

The Balancing Act, 1757–1904

HIGHLANDER

In the spring of 1774, two messengers arrived in Calcutta bearing a rather curious letter for the British governor-general of Bengal. The letter was signed by the head lama of Tashilhunpo monastery in Tibet or, as the British came to know him, the Teshoo Lama. He was, in fact, the sixth Panchen Lama, Losang Palden Yeshe. The British governor-general was impressed by the eloquence of the missive, which was a plea for the British to refrain from their recent hostilities against the ruler of Bhutan. He was even more impressed by the presents that had been carried over the Himalayas to Calcutta, which included sheets of gilt leather stamped with the Russian eagle, bags of musk and gold dust, Tibetan woollen cloth and Chinese silk. Looking over these goods, and examining the well-constructed wooden chests that held them, he saw evidence of an advanced and wealthy civilisation with extensive trade connections.¹

The recipient of the letter was Warren Hastings, a man in his early forties who had worked his way up through the ranks of the East India Company to become governor-general. The Company, probably the first multinational, was in the process of transforming northern India into Britain's greatest conquest. But at this point in time the governor-general was still in the employment of the board of directors of the East India Company in London, and profit margins were paramount.

The civilised tone of the Panchen Lama's letter, and the goods that came with it, opened up the tantalising possibility of new trade opportunities. Tibet

had gold, silver and musk, but even more intriguing was the Chinese silk. The East India Company had been trying without success to engage in trade with China. Might it be able to make a fresh approach through Tibet? Might the Panchen Lama be a go-between? The little spat between Bhutan and the British had already ended with a British victory, extending the Company's influence right up to the foothills of the Himalayas. As a result, it was easy enough for Hastings to agree to the Panchen Lama's request for peace. He also started to organise a diplomatic mission to Tibet aimed at establishing a trade agreement. On the mission would be the two messengers who had brought the Panchen Lama's letter to Calcutta, a Tibetan called Pema and an Indian mendicant called Purangir. To lead the mission, Hastings appointed his own private secretary, a young Scotsman called George Bogle.

These were good people to choose for this arduous journey. Pema had already shown himself able to withstand the heat and humidity of India, so often fatal to Tibetans. Purangir was a *gosain*, an Indian trading monk, and, although only in his mid-twenties, already a veteran traveller in India and Tibet. Though they were not Buddhists but devotees of Shiva, a transient community of *gosains* lived in the Panchen Lama's courtyard at Tashilhunpo. In return for their accommodation, they provided him with intelligence gleaned from their travels. From his window the Panchen Lama would quiz them every day about the people and events they had encountered on their travels.

As for George Bogle, this young civil servant had little experience of travel in Asia but had impressed Hastings with his enthusiasm and loyalty. He was intelligent, curious and engaging, an ideal diplomat if a little outspoken at times. Bogle knew next to nothing about Tibet; he had to make do with the accounts of the Italian priests who had been there before him and the map drawn up by the Jesuits a few decades earlier. His party set off later that summer, travelling up the Hugli river in the middle of the drenching, muddy monsoon. In his journal Bogle had nothing positive to say about this part of his journey, or about his meeting with the nawab of Bengal. But once the mission began to ascend to the highlands of Bhutan, enthusiasm caught hold, and he began to grow a Bhutanese-style moustache and learn the local language of Dzongkha.

Then a letter arrived. As soon as he heard of the British mission, the Panchen Lama had written to Lhasa to inform the regent who was ruling during the minority of the eighth Dalai Lama. The regent strongly disapproved

of the mission. He had heard that 'the Company was like a great King, and fond of war and conquest'. On receiving this advice, the Panchen Lama then wrote to Bogle to say that he could not possibly receive the mission because Tibet was subject to the Chinese emperor, who had forbidden entry to any Indians, Afghans or Europeans. Unconvinced by the Panchen Lama's excuse, Bogle sent his companions, Pema and Purangir, to try to persuade him directly. They were successful. The Panchen Lama sent an invitation to Bogle, and the mission travelled across the border into Tibet.

When Bogle finally met the Panchen Lama it was not at Tashilhunpo, but at a smaller monastery to the north where the Panchen Lama had gone to avoid a smallpox epidemic. Bogle did not know what to expect; earlier accounts suggested that the high lamas were surrounded by ceremony and ritual, were veiled and never spoke. So Bogle was surprised to find the Panchen Lama an approachable, rotund man in his mid-thirties, who immediately started to talk to him in Hindi, a language he had learned from his mother. Bogle's Hindi was good enough to allow the two to converse without an interpreter. They exchanged civilities, then briefly discussed the British war with Bhutan. Then came a barrage of questions from the curious Panchen Lama about the East India Company and Bogle's homeland. Was it an island? Was it near the legendary land of cannibals? Was it near Ceylon? Bogle did the best he could to answer these questions, which were based on the Panchen Lama's education in traditional Buddhist geography.

In the meetings that followed, the Panchen Lama adopted the informal dress code of a simple monk, and showed himself an easygoing and jovial host. And he had many more questions for Bogle. One subject that threatened difficulties was religion. Bogle wrote that the Panchen Lama 'enquired if we worshipped the *Criss*, making the cross with his fingers, and adding that there were formerly some Fringy padres at Lahassa who worshipped the *Criss*; but they bred disturbances and were turned out of the country'. The Italian priests had indeed been expelled some years before, during the reign of Pholhane, and Bogle was not at all keen to be identified with them. He therefore (somewhat disingenuously) told the Panchen Lama that the Italians were intolerant and keen to convert everyone to their own religion, whereas everyone in England worshipped God in their own way.²

There, to Bogle's relief, the matter was allowed to drop for the moment, though the Panchen Lama did return to religion in later meetings. Was it true, he asked, that Bogle's God was born three times? Bogle, feeling himself unequal

to explaining the mysteries of the Trinity, merely replied that in his faith God had always existed. The Panchen Lama, with characteristic tolerance, observed that ‘we all worshipped the same God, but under different names, and all aimed at the same object, though we pursued different ways’. Bogle was surprised to hear from the Panchen Lama that Buddhism was also the religion of China. ‘What a tract of country does it extend over!’³

During other meetings the Panchen Lama displayed his curiosity about more mundane matters. He showed Bogle his collection of watches (of which only one still worked), and a pocket compass that the Chinese emperor had given him. He also brought out a small vase painted with pictures of two shepherdesses, remarking that their features and complexions were similar to Bogle’s own. Bogle explained that the British merchants at Canton brought pictures from England which were then copied by the Chinese. The Panchen Lama also owned a broken hand-organ, and several pictures of London, about which Bogle had to answer ‘many pertinent questions.’⁴ There were also conversations about comets and eclipses, and exotic animals, and a request that Bogle speak some English, a language the Panchen Lama had never heard; awkwardly, Bogle recited some verses from Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’.

As for his real business in Tibet, Bogle had little success. Despite his friendliness, the Panchen Lama was a shrewd politician and had no wish to antagonise the regent in Lhasa or the emperor in Beijing. In fact, the Panchen Lama managed to get more out of the visit than Bogle. He was keen to found a temple dedicated to Buddhism in its homeland of India; just a year after Bogle’s return, Bhot Bhagan (‘Tibet Garden’) was consecrated on the banks of the Hugli in Calcutta. With Purangir as its caretaker, this Gelug temple housed Tibetan pilgrims and monks visiting India.

In the end Bogle’s mission is best remembered for the openness and friendship shown in his relationship with the Panchen Lama. About to leave for India in the spring of 1775, Bogle wrote to his sister:

As the time of my departure drew near, I found that I should not be able to bid adieu to the Lama without a heavy heart. The kind and hospitable reception he had given me, and the amiable disposition which he possesses, I must confess had attached me to him, and I shall feel a hearty regret at parting. In spite of all my journeyings and wanderings over the face of the earth, I have not yet learned to take leave, and I cannot reconcile myself to the thoughts of a last farewell.⁵

TIBET

AT THE MANCHU COURT

A few years after Bogle's visit, the Panchen Lama was approached by emissaries from another distant empire. The emperor of China's Qing dynasty, Qianlong, was making preparations for his seventieth birthday celebrations. Would the Panchen Lama condescend to honour the emperor with his presence? It was a difficult decision for the Panchen Lama. The journey to Beijing was long and hard, and for this reason he had turned down previous invitations. But the emperor's rule, as the Panchen Lama had pointed out to Bogle, extended over Tibet, and his requests were not to be turned down lightly.

Of all the Manchu emperors, Qianlong showed the most personal interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and was the most generous in his patronage. He had studied Buddhism with Tibetan lamas from a young age, was said to practise daily meditation, and was devoted to his mother, a pious Buddhist whose ornate embroidered portrait of Green Tara, a female deity representing compassionate activity, can still be seen in Beijing today. More importantly for the Panchen Lama's school, he was extravagantly generous in founding Gelug temples (including the famous Yonghegong, or 'Lama Temple', in Beijing) and funding other projects such as the printing of the Tibetan canon. The 'Qianlong Edition' is still much in use today.

Of course, for great rulers such religious activities always serve a political purpose, and Qianlong was not shy of using Tibetan Buddhism to keep the troublesome Mongols on his side. By now the influence of the Manchu empire extended deep into Tibet and, following the final bloody defeat of the Junghar Mongols, right across Mongolia as well. The emperor recognised that the Tibetans and Mongols would accept Manchu power much more readily if they perceived him as a defender of the faith, a dharma king. As one scholar puts it: 'On the one hand, Qianlong was personally deeply interested in Tibetan Buddhism; on the other hand, he never missed an opportunity to use Tibetan Buddhism to further Qing strategic interests.'⁶

As soon as the emperor heard that the Panchen Lama might be willing to make the journey, he sent an envoy with a formal invitation and a pearl rosary, and began preparations for the lama's visit. The Yellow Temple where the fifth Dalai Lama had stayed during his visit to Beijing was refurbished, and work began on an extravagant building project at Chengde, a replica of Tashilhunpo, the Panchen Lama's own monastery. When Qianlong hadn't heard back from the envoy for two months, he worried that the pearl rosary had been stolen and

ordered that all of the courier posts should be searched for the box that contained it.

He need not have worried. Within the next month the Panchen Lama sent back a reply that he would begin his journey in the summer of that year, 1779, and spend the winter in the Kumbum monastery before proceeding to Chengde. The Panchen Lama's journey mirrored that of the Great Fifth in the previous century. In addition to a group of close attendants, including his brother the Trungpa tulku, a huge retinue accompanied him, and at every stage of the journey thousands of monks and laypeople came to see him and receive his blessing. Every time the procession made camp, a wooden throne was set up and draped with brocade so that local people could file past and receive the touch of the lama's foot (the touch of the hand was reserved for those of high rank, and of the forehead for lamas of equal status).

Once he reached Kumbum, an impressive monastic complex surrounded by gentle green hills, the Panchen Lama relaxed into a winter of teachings and discussions with the monks of the monastery. Here he also received an unexpected visitor, Purangir, the Panchen Lama's go-between with the British, sent by George Bogle, who was hoping to capitalise on his friendship with the Panchen Lama to secure a passport to the Manchu court. The passport would not be forthcoming, but Purangir, now acting as a British agent, pressed the Panchen Lama to bring up the matter of trade with the British when he met the emperor.

As the snows of that winter thawed, the Panchen Lama's party made preparations for the second leg of the journey, through the deserts of Inner Mongolia and the smallpox-ridden towns of northern China. Smallpox was especially feared by travellers. In fact, when the Panchen Lama had turned down previous invitations from Qianlong, fear of smallpox had been a sufficient excuse. Inoculation against the disease in infancy had been practised in China for centuries, though not systematically enough to eradicate it. The procedure involved plugging the nose with wads of cotton soaked in camphor, herbs and powdered smallpox scabs. The Tibetans, who did not practise inoculation, were uncertain whether they should try it before entering China. In the end, it was decided that those who had not already had the disease in childhood and thus were not immune, should undergo inoculation. But there was still uncertainty about the Panchen Lama. After all, he was considered an emanation of the buddha Amitabha; shouldn't that be enough of an insurance against the disease? The Panchen Lama performed a divination, and on that basis decided not to undergo inoculation.

As the Panchen Lama's party – minus those being inoculated – set off for the summer capital, Chengde, the emperor kept a watchful eye on their progress, sending a constant stream of supplies and letters to the Panchen Lama enquiring after his health. Then, a month's journey from the capital, the Panchen Lama was met by the emperor's welcoming party, headed by his favourite Tibetan lama at court, Changkya Rolpai Dorje. This was not the first meeting between Changkya and the Panchen Lama. Changkya had made two visits to Tibet, the first to escort the seventh Dalai Lama to his enthronement in Lhasa, and the second to supervise the funeral of the seventh Dalai Lama and the search for the eighth.

Working together, Changkya and the young Panchen Lama had overcome a dispute between three different candidates for recognition as the eighth Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama gave his support to a boy from his own region of Tsang, and Changkya urged the abbots and councillors to accept this decision. However, when the Panchen Lama had asked Changkya to come to Tashilhunpo to give him some teachings, the plan was vetoed by his own advisors, who feared that such a visit would put the Panchen Lama in the position of an inferior and 'harm the dignity' of Tashilhunpo. At that time, as he was preparing to return to China, the Panchen Lama had written a letter to Changkya expressing the hope that the two of them would be able to discuss religion at some point in the future.

Though he spent most of his life in China, Changkya was at least as influential a figure in Tibetan politics as the Panchen Lama. He had the ear of the emperor, having grown up with him. Plucked from his monastery in Amdo to serve at the court, Changkya had been educated alongside the prince who was to become the Qianlong Emperor. Later, when Qianlong ascended the throne, Changkya often advised him on Tibetan matters. When the great political turmoil in Lhasa in the middle of the eighteenth century culminated in the murder of the ambans, an angry Qianlong had considered building a large Chinese-style city in Lhasa and handing over the government and courts to Manchu officials. Changkya had knelt down before the emperor and begged him not to implement this plan, arguing that it would sound the death knell of Tibetan Buddhism. In the end, the emperor was persuaded to take an alternative route, placing the Dalai Lama at the head of a new Tibetan government.

In fact, it was Changkya who had orchestrated the Panchen Lama's visit to China; he had also recently been giving the emperor refresher classes in Tibetan, so that he could converse directly with his guest. Now he escorted the

Panchen Lama on the last leg of his journey. When they approached Chengde at last, the emperor sent another welcoming party. In traditional fashion, court officials ran towards the Tibetan party with their horses, bowed to the ground three times, and then ran back, to be replaced by another set of officials who also ran up, bowed and ran back. The Panchen Lama and the other Tibetans could not help being amused by this serious but slightly ridiculous spectacle. Then the Panchen Lama was carried towards the palace on the emperor's own sedan chair. Embarrassed at being brought to the palace in this way, he kept trying to get down, but was told by the officials to stay put.

The approach to the emperor's residence was designed to instil wonder and reverence. Thousands gathered, though they seemed strangely silent to the Tibetans. They were probably there by imperial order rather than out of reverence for the Panchen Lama, as the practice of Tibetan Buddhism did not extend much beyond the Manchu court in China. The Panchen Lama was carried through the many gates and courtyards of the Forbidden City until at last he saw the emperor and got down from the sedan chair. As the emperor approached, still strong and vigorous despite his seventy years, the Panchen Lama began to kneel, but the emperor stopped him, saying in Tibetan, 'Lama, please do not kneel,' and presenting him with a white scarf in the Tibetan fashion.

That at least is the version of events given in a contemporary Tibetan account. The Chinese gazetteers saw things quite differently, claiming that the Panchen Lama insisted on performing a full prostration, or kowtow, to the emperor, saying, 'For this Old Buddha, I would perform the rites of bowing.' While the Tibetan and Chinese versions clearly serve their own different interests, we also have the account of Purangir, who was one of the six attendants chosen by the Panchen Lama to accompany him into the emperor's presence. This witness wrote that the emperor walked up to the Panchen Lama and, 'immediately stretching forth his hand, and taking hold of the Lama's, led him towards the throne, where, after many salutations, and expressions of affection and pleasure, on both sides, the Lama was seated by the emperor upon the uppermost cushion with himself, at his right hand.'⁷

The Panchen Lama's stay in the capital was highly choreographed and offered little chance to rest. He was taken on tours of the capital's palaces and monasteries and asked to bless them, served innumerable cups of tea, and presented with elaborate banquets where he was served from a hundred golden dishes. Thankfully the Panchen Lama was allowed to sit out ten

gruelling days of Chinese opera after the emperor kindly suggested that he attend just the opening day. But there was no rest even during these 'free' days, since the Panchen Lama received an almost constant stream of visitors. One of these, a Chinese Buddhist priest from the forested hills near the capital, gently reprimanded the Panchen Lama for coming to China, telling him his place was in Tibet. The Panchen Lama politely thanked the priest for his kind advice and bade him goodbye. This encounter offered a hint of the resentment felt by Chinese Buddhists at the Manchu court's favouritism towards Tibetan Buddhism.⁸

According to Purangir, the Panchen Lama mentioned the British in one of his conversations with the emperor, asking Qianlong to consider writing to his friend, a governor of Hindustan called Mr Hastings. The emperor replied politely that it would give him great pleasure to make the acquaintance of this Mr Hastings, and correspond with him. He even promised to write a letter for the Panchen Lama to take back to Tibet and forward to him. But this overture to the British was never received, for the Panchen Lama would not return to Tibet.

Some three months into the visit, and now staying in Beijing, the Panchen Lama's attendants noticed that he was not eating. He confirmed that he had lost his appetite, but was otherwise fine. Later Changkya noticed that the Panchen Lama had left his food at an imperial banquet, and suggested that he postpone the tantric initiation he was about to perform for the emperor. The Panchen Lama assured Changkya that he was not seriously ill, and the ceremony went ahead. Afterwards, the Panchen Lama smiled at Changkya and said, 'I feel released and happy. All my work is done. Now I will take a few days' rest and I will be fine.' Changkya, not at all reassured, responded, 'How can you say your work is done? As long as there are beings in samsara your work is not finished. Do not say such things. You have fulfilled all the emperor's wishes, but now you must go back to Tibet to help countless beings. Do not say such things, even in jest!' The Panchen Lama demurred: 'Yes, you are right. I just made a kind of joke. There are many things to do. So, I will pray as you wish.'⁹

With people crowding around the Panchen Lama's residence at all hours to receive his blessing, there was no time for him to rest. As Purangir reported, 'sometimes the whole day, and the greatest part of the night, was occupied in this manner.' Then, after a morning visit to the emperor, the Panchen Lama returned to his lodgings complaining of a violent headache. An hour later his skin was covered with red spots. There was no longer any doubt: it was the

dreaded smallpox. The emperor rushed to the Panchen Lama's bedside, bringing his best doctors with him. He held the lama's hand for some time and talked with him. Afterwards he ordered several large medical paintings showing all the stages of smallpox to be hung up in the Panchen Lama's room as an aid to the doctors. The emperor kept repeating the same orders to those around him before returning to his palace. During the next few days Changkya was often by the lama's bedside, and they finally had the chance for those discussions about religious matters that the Panchen Lama had tried and failed to achieve back in Tibet.

But on the fourth day of the smallpox, the Panchen Lama requested that six or seven attendants, including Purangir, come and pray with him in his room, as 'he found his disorder so much more than he could support, that he found their prayers the only comfort he could now enjoy, and that by joining them to his own, his heart would be entirely eased, whatever effect it might have on his distemper'. The Panchen Lama spent his last day sitting on his bed with his back against the wall, supported on either side by two large pillows. He died in that position, praying.¹⁰

The emperor came to the Panchen Lama's rooms the next day, and found the body still in the meditation posture. Rather than leave the body for the three days that Tibetans regard as necessary to ensure the departure of the stream of consciousness, the emperor had it placed in a coffin filled with herbs, and ordered the construction of a golden stupa to house the coffin. It was the best he could do, for this unexpected event was a very inauspicious end to the meticulously planned birthday celebrations. Later, in a letter to the Dalai Lama, he expressed his regrets: 'Although I am well aware that to come and go are but as the same thing to the Panchen Lama, yet when I reflect that he made a most long and painful journey for the sole purpose of doing honour to me, and that after having fulfilled that object it was not his fate to return in tranquillity, as I had hoped, to the place of his usual abode, this reflection is distressing to me beyond all expression.'¹¹

THE EMPEROR'S PRESENTS

The emperor's lavish attempts to make amends for his own part in the death of the Panchen Lama were to have unexpected consequences, reaching all the way across Tibet to the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. Soon after the Panchen Lama's death, heavy snow fell in Beijing, and continued to fall for over two

months. When the weather eased, the emperor summoned the Panchen Lama's brother and made plans for the return of the body, in its coffin and golden stupa, to Tibet. Also to travel to Tibet were the valuable gifts that the emperor had presented to the Panchen Lama, and further farewell gifts that he heaped on his brother. And so the Tibetans began the sad and solemn journey home.

It was the emperor's presents that started the trouble. The Panchen Lama's brother, who had accompanied him to China and supervised the return of his body to Tibet, was a reincarnate lama known as the Trungpa tulku. In fact, the Panchen Lama's mother had borne three other sons, each of whom had been recognised as tulkus. One had been chosen as the tenth Shamar tulku, the Red Crown lama of the Karma Kagyu school, a line of lamas that had played an important political role in Tibet before the rise of the Gelug school in the last century. Added to that, one of the Panchen Lama's nieces had been recognised as the Dorje Pagmo tulku, the only female line of reincarnate lamas in Tibet. Such a concentration of reborn lamas in a single influential family was not as unusual as it might seem.

Now, as the emperor's gifts had been given to the Trungpa tulku, when he arrived back in Tibet in 1780 he deposited them in Tashilhunpo, of which he was the treasurer. But another of the Panchen Lama's brothers, the Shamar tulku, argued that these were personal gifts and therefore family property, meaning that he ought to be able to claim his share. Trungpa refused to budge, and closed the doors of Tashilhunpo to Shamar. Refusing to back down, Shamar called the monks of his own monastery to back him up and stormed into Tashilhunpo, taking his share of the presents.

This was a rash move. Considering the history of enmity between the Red Crown lamas and the Gelug school, there was little chance that Shamar would get the support of the authorities. And, indeed, he did not. The emperor's presents were taken back from him, and Shamar was placed under house arrest in his monastery. Having run out of options in Tibet, he fled to Nepal, where he could expect a better reception. Previous Shamar tulkus had travelled to Nepal and enjoyed the patronage of Nepalese kings. Now Shamar threw himself upon the mercy of the court at Kathmandu.¹²

Recently the old rulers of Nepal had been conquered by the fearsome Gurkhas. The new Gurkha rulers had already caused trouble by invading Sikkim and helping the Bhutanese in the military excursion that had resulted in George Bogle's visit to Tibet. It was only a matter of time before the Gurkhas

turned to Tibet itself. Indeed, the Gurkha ruler was already involved in several disputes with Tibet. The coinage circulating in Tibet had been minted in Nepal for centuries, but now the Gurkhas wanted to mint a pure silver currency and devalue the alloy coins that were used in Tibet. Of course, this would mean a great financial loss for the Tibetans, and they refused. There was also a dispute about the quality of the salt sold to the Nepalese by the Tibetans, but all of these disagreements looked more like pretexts than genuine reasons for a military expedition.

In 1788, the Shamar tulku appeared in Nepal and told the Gurkha ruler about his troubles over the property in Tashilhunpo. The result was a letter from the Gurkhas to the Kashag, the governing council in Lhasa, stating that they were holding Shamar hostage until their terms were met. The Kashag agreed to a slight reduction in the value of the coins, but had little interest in the hostage. In fact, it was suspicious of Shamar's intentions and wrote back to him to say that he had gone to Nepal willingly, so it was of no concern to the Kashag if he had been taken hostage. 'Knowing how to shoot,' it concluded, 'you bought the bow.'

These suspicions were not unfounded. Shamar had already decided to switch his allegiance to the Gurkhas. He and his entourage had signed an oath of faith and commitment known as a *dharmapatra*, in which they swore that 'we no longer support Chinese Lhasa' – meaning the Dalai Lama and his government – 'rather becoming subjects of Your Gurkha Majesty'. This was perhaps not quite the act of treachery it seemed. There were others among the ordinary Tibetans who disliked Lhasa's reliance on China, and some had suggested that the Gurkhas would have made better allies. Shamar also renewed the relationship his previous rebirths had formed with the Buddhists of the Kathmandu valley, the Bajracharyas, by paying for expensive renovations at the holy site of Swayambhu. At this popular pilgrimage (and now tourist) site, there is still a bronze bell donated by Shamar, its Tibetan inscription expressing the usual Buddhist aspirations, including the hope that 'evil forces' will not trample upon those who apply themselves to the Buddha's teachings. The bell is a reminder of Shamar's precarious position in Nepal.¹³

The sequel of the Tibetans' abrupt letter to the Gurkhas was the inevitable assault on Tibet. The Gurkha army was feared not only for its ferocious fighting, but also for its merciless looting and pillaging. The areas across the border from Nepal suffered greatly from its incursion and the Kashag was sure that Shamar had provided the army with information about the terrain. As the Gurkhas got

closer to Tashilhunpo, Trungpa fled to Lhasa along with the new Panchen Lama, who was six. The Tibetan army was ordered to defend the border, but the fierce Gurkha army proved too strong. At the same time the ambans in Lhasa sent messages to Qianlong, who despatched an army to the border. The Manchus were more interested in a quick peace than a long fight with the Gurkhas, and encouraged the Tibetans to come to a deal. Shamar offered to act as a middleman.

The negotiations ended in a poor deal for the Tibetans, including the payment of an annual tribute. A year later the Tibetans duly paid the agreed amount, but after another year had passed, they balked and tried for a more favourable deal. Another negotiating party was sent to the border to meet with Shamar and the Gurkhas. But it was a trap. The Tibetans were captured and the Gurkhas advanced again. This time they had the wealth of Tashilhunpo firmly in their sights. The young Panchen Lama had to flee to Lhasa again as his monastery was overrun and its treasures were looted by the Gurkha army. Lhasa was convulsed with fear.

In these troubled times lamas from the Nyingma school, usually *personae non gratae* among the Gelug establishment, were asked to perform wrathful rites to repel the invaders. An eminent Nyingma lama known as Dodrupchen, 'The Great Adept from Do', went to the ancient Samye complex, and in an extraordinary scene shouted at the statue of Pehar, pulled off its textile coverings and slapped it with the end of his robe, challenging the protector to live up to his promise to look after Tibet. In Lhasa, wealthy aristocrats began to pack up their valuable belongings in preparation for fleeing east. Such was the panic that the eighth Dalai Lama had to address the city from a balcony of the Jokhang, assuring his audience that he at least would not flee. There was also some comfort in a letter received from Dodrupchen, which assured the government that it had nothing more to fear from the Gurkhas.¹⁴

The Tibetan army advanced on Tashilhunpo. It seemed hopeless, but a clever cutting-off of the Gurkhas' supply lines, in addition to an outbreak of disease among the Nepalese ranks, helped the Tibetan cause. It seemed that the dharma protector had remembered his vows after all. The Gurkhas retreated from Tashilhunpo, taking the monastery's spoils with them. And then the Chinese arrived. Qianlong had seen that the Gurkhas needed to be thoroughly defeated and sent one of his best generals at the head of a massive army of seventeen thousand soldiers. The Gurkhas were fought back to the Tibetan border, and then pursued by the Chinese army deep into Nepal. As a

last resort, the Gurkhas sent a request for help to the British in India; it was turned down.

Just twenty miles from Kathmandu, the Nepalese army finally surrendered. The Gurkha leader turned and fled. All of the loot was reclaimed and carried back to Tibet over the mountain passes on the backs of a hundred porters. Though the Tibetans had played their part in the Gurkha defeat, it was a truly impressive achievement for Qianlong. He had shown just how far the Manchus could extend their influence. And the emperor's presents, the cause of all the trouble, went back to China.

As for Shamar, the Tibetan councillors still considered him the real culprit, but found to their frustration that no further punishment could be inflicted upon him, for he was already dead. His followers said that it was hepatitis but many, including his enemies in Tibet, were certain that Shamar had committed suicide. The Tibetan government meted out what punishment they could, nonetheless, banning the recognition of any more Shamar tulkus, effectively ending the line (until its restoration in the twentieth century). As a final insult, the red ceremonial crown of the Shamar tulkus, which had been passed down through this line of lamas since the fourteenth century, was buried underneath Shamar's monastery in Lhasa. The monastery itself was converted into a court-house where the crown would be walked over – a sign of the greatest disrespect – by hundreds of people every day.¹⁵

As for the Qianlong Emperor, he was convinced that these troubles were the result of the strife between the Shamar and Trungpa tulkus. Always the micro-manager, he decided to extend his control to cover the selection of reincarnate lamas. The Manchu general, his seventeen thousand-strong army still in Tibet, sat down with the Tibetan government to negotiate a new set of regulations. The result was the 'Ordinance for the More Efficient Governing of Tibet'. The first of its twenty-nine articles introduced the Golden Urn. This vessel – which would come to be hated by many Tibetans – was to replace the divinations and tests that the Tibetans used to select tulkus. From now on, the candidates' names would be written in Manchu, Chinese and Tibetan on ivory slips, and placed in the urn. Then, in front of the famous statue in the Jokhang monastery, the Tibetan lamas and Chinese ambans would pick out one slip between them. By means of this 'lucky dip', Qianlong hoped to break up the concentration of tulkus in certain influential families. Another article showed how closely Qianlong wished to control the tulku system: a detailed register was to be kept of all the tulkus and other high lamas under the Dalai Lama's jurisdiction.

Another thing that Qianlong was sure about was the need to keep a close eye on Tibet's border with Nepal and India. He was not contemplating making 'Tibet' part of 'China': the idea of 'China' as a nation state had not yet come into being. While a nation state conceives of everyone within its borders as subjects of its government, an empire is a much looser structure. The Manchus still ruled over an empire in the traditional sense of an imperial capital surrounded by concentric rings of power and influence; the further out you went, the less the people were integrated into the empire. Direct rule of Tibet would have been hugely expensive and an administrative nightmare. For Qianlong, the ideal balance was to extend just enough control to the further reaches of his empire to keep the peace, at minimum expense to the imperial coffers.¹⁶

But the times were changing, especially with the British on the scene. Henceforth, nobody would travel in or out of Tibet without a passport, and no passports would be issued to Europeans. The British were widely suspected of helping the Gurkhas, and it is true that they had begun to make overtures to Nepal. They were also still trying to get to the lucrative Chinese markets. In 1793, Qianlong, with imperious insouciance, brushed away the magnificent East India Company trade mission headed by George Macartney. The era of cross-cultural exchange, represented by Bogle and Purangir, was over. From now on Tibet was to be a closed door to foreigners.

KINGDOM IN THE EAST

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, it might have looked as if the future of Tibet was going to be decided by the ruling councils of Lhasa and the imperial diktat of Beijing. But, in many ways, this was not the case. Unnoticed by the powers that be, the cultural vitality of Tibet had shifted eastwards to Kham, a domain of loosely connected kingdoms which had never been convincingly annexed to any empire. The famous four rivers and six mountains of Kham were formidable barriers to would-be conquerors, and the ferocity of the Khampa horsemen was legendary throughout Tibet. A sword or at least a long knife always dangled from the waist of every Khampa, including the monks. By the nineteenth century, Kham was also awash with guns. The threat of violence was never far away: every journey was at risk of banditry, every drinking session might end in a quarrel, or murder. Feuds between villages could go on for generations, and fighting between them was usually to the death.¹⁷

Paradoxically, Kham had always provided Tibet with the lion's share of great Buddhist scholars and meditators. There is an old Tibetan saying that Western Tibet has the great mountain (that is, Kailash), Central Tibet has the great monasteries, and Eastern Tibet has the great lamas. The monasteries of Central Tibet have always had a large, and sometimes overwhelming, contingent of Khampa monks: as long ago as the fourteenth century Longchenpa had abandoned his monastic university because, as a Central Tibetan, he had found himself outnumbered and ostracised by the monks from Kham. And Kham itself is studded with sacred sites associated with the retreats of famous meditators.

It was in Kham that Tibet's great warrior hero Gesar was said to have been born, in the province of Ling. Gesar embodied all that was thought most admirable in a Khampa warrior: stunning horsemanship, deadly swordsmanship, death-defying bravado and a cunning way with words. For centuries Gesar's exploits had been told by bards and handed down from one generation to the next. With its roots in the heroic culture of the Tibetan imperial period, the tale of Gesar had grown to become the longest epic poem in the world. The first printed version was produced in Kham in the nineteenth century.¹⁸

At the very heart of Kham was the ancient kingdom of Derge, ruled by a proud line of kings who traced their lineage all the way back to the Gar clan who had ruled the eastern marches of the Tibetan empire in the seventh century.¹⁹ In the thirteenth century, while under the rule of Kubilai Khan, the kings of Derge had converted to the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, a loyalty that lasted right through to the fall of the kingdom to the Communists in the twentieth century. Yet Derge always maintained an ideal of religious tolerance, as one of the great kings of the early nineteenth century wrote: 'All of the kings, with their compassion and skilful means, were certain that each and every school without distinction – including the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, Nyingma and Bon – were genuine sources of benefit and happiness. And thus, regarding them without partiality, they trained in them all with devotion.'²⁰

This ideal of nonsectarianism – of not just tolerance, but a genuine appreciation and support for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and Bon – was not unique to Derge. In Tibet's 'golden age' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, nonsectarianism was the norm throughout Tibet, and figures such as Longchenpa and Tsongkhapa expected to study with teachers from different schools. The change began with the great sectarian wars that blighted Central Tibet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, setting the Kagyu schools

against the Gelug. The final victory of the Gelug school, on the shoulders of the Qoshot Mongol armies, sounded the death knell of the nonsectarian ideal. From that time on, the government of the Dalai Lamas and the great monasteries of Drepung, Ganden, Sera and Tashilhunpo would determine the religious and cultural development of Central Tibet.

Yet this victory of the Gelug school in the centre was itself a cause of the cultural enrichment of Kham. When the great Encampment of the Karma Kagyu school was crushed by the Mongol armies, the Karmapa fled east. In the eighteenth century, a great Karma Kagyu monastery was established in Derge by a tulku known as the eighth Tai Situ. This monastery, Palpung, rapidly became one of the most vibrant centres for scholarship and the arts in Eastern Tibet. The Encampment of the Karmapa, which had reconstituted itself in a more modest form, was now often to be seen near Palpung. The eighth Tai Situ was a scholar whose mastery of Sanskrit had earned him the nickname Situ Panchen, 'The Great Pandita'. He was also an accomplished and original artist. Situ Panchen became the teacher and then the court chaplain of the fortieth king of Derge, Tenpa Tsering. Out of this relationship came one of the great achievements of Derge – the carefully edited and beautifully produced wood-block prints of the Buddhist canon, a joint effort involving Kagyu and Sakya monks. From this time onwards, the Derge printing house or Parkhang became famous throughout Tibet.²¹

As was so often the case in Tibet, the greatest Buddhist patrons were often also the most warlike of rulers. It was Tenpa Tsering who transformed Derge from one among many petty kingdoms into the most powerful kingdom in Kham, a feat that earned him (at least within Derge) the flattering nickname of 'the second Songtsen Gampo'. He was also the first of the Derge kings to enter into a relationship with the Manchus in China. When the Manchus chased the Junghar Mongols out of Tibet in 1720, Kham was split in two, with the western part falling under the jurisdiction of the Lhasa government, and the eastern part under the Manchu emperor. The Manchus treated Kham as a buffer zone; beyond ensuring the flow of trade, they were not particularly interested in what happened there. The usual strategy they employed in such places was to empower local rulers to run the place. So Tenpa Tsering was given a Chinese title meaning roughly 'Keeper of the Peace', the highest rank of anyone in Kham. He played his part well, keeping the peace by suppressing other chieftains who threatened to disrupt the steady flow of trade between China and Tibet.

Yet the newly enlarged kingdom of Derge and its nonsectarian ideals were still under threat, both from without and from within. One of the most serious external threats was from the Gelug lamas at the Manchu court, such as Changkya Rolpai Dorje who had been instrumental in arranging the Panchen Lama's visit to China. These lamas, often frustrated by the fairly weak Gelug presence in Eastern Tibet and a corresponding lack of political influence there, had aspirations to extend the reach of their school here. When military expeditions were sent to the Sino-Tibetan borderlands by the Manchu emperor, they served as opportunities to assert religious authority as well. In the 1770s, the Bon school was almost wiped off the map in these borderlands with the help of modern cannons designed for the emperor by the Jesuits and ancient war rituals performed by Changkya.²²

So far Derge had resisted such incursions, and the threat to nonsectarianism within its borders came from the Sakya school, which had traditionally been the main beneficiary of court patronage. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the king and queen of Derge paid a visit to the famous Nyingma hermit Jigme Lingpa and became his disciples. Jigme Lingpa lived in Central Tibet, where he worked to defend the embattled Nyingma traditions while at the same time revitalising the Great Perfection through his discoveries of terma texts. The old lama was not very respectful, insisting that the king should pay the local community for his horses instead of requisitioning them in the usual way, but his attitude did nothing to diminish the awe of the king and queen.

Though Jigme Lingpa refused to travel to Derge, he did send one of his best students. Dodrupchen – whom we last saw performing rites to repel the Gurkhas – became a tutor to the Derge royal family. The trouble began when the king died suddenly on a journey to Central Tibet, leaving the queen as regent and ruler, for their son was only four years old. There was no love lost between the queen and the Sakya monks at Derge, who she had alienated with her preference for Nyingma lamas. In 1798, the queen was sent into exile along with Dodrupchen and a number of other Nyingma lamas; she died there. After her death the prince was brought back to the Derge court and educated at the Sakya monastery.²³

If anything, this ugly incident only served to increase the importance of the nonsectarian ideal in Derge. The prince later became the king of Derge and a supporter of all the schools. After he left the throne to take monk's robes, he wrote a genealogy of the rulers of Derge in which he reiterated the

nonsectarian tradition of his forefathers.²⁴ And so as we enter the nineteenth century we see Derge pressed between the twin powers of Lhasa and Beijing, both firm partisans of the Gelug school, but with its own kings still dedicated to the ideal of a nonsectarian Buddhism. How long could such an ideal be maintained? This was one of the questions that inspired the men behind the cultural renaissance in nineteenth-century Kham, a movement that has had a huge effect on the development of Tibetan Buddhism right through to the present day.

RENAISSANCE

In the summer of 1820, a baby boy was born into a wealthy and influential Derge family. His biographers record that the placenta was wrapped around the newborn baby like a monk's robe. They also mention other miraculous signs that are held to herald the birth of a remarkable person, such as all the water in the house turning into milk and rainbow-hued clouds appearing in the sky. The boy was named Tsering Dondrup, 'Long-Lived and Successful', but he would be better known by the religious name that he received at the age of twelve, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, the prime mover and inspiration for the great cultural revival that swept through Kham in the nineteenth century.²⁵

Jamyang Khyentse's father was an official at the Derge court. The latter arranged for his son to be educated in the accomplishments of a young Tibetan noble destined for government service. His mother taught him to write, and his father taught him the calligraphic skills needed by government officials. The boy also learned astrology and medicine before entering into the formidable realm of Sanskrit grammar and poetics. But a career in the Derge civil service was not to be. This accomplished youth had caught the attention of the Sakya lamas in Derge. When he was twelve, an abbot from the Sakya monastery of Ngor in Central Tibet had paid a visit to the family home, and the result was that Jamyang Khyentse was recognised as the rebirth of a previous abbot.

This kind of thing had become the established practice. An intelligent and able young man of good birth represented a catch for both the Derge court and the monasteries, and only by recognising him as a tulku, even at the rather late age of twelve years old, could the monasteries be sure that he would not be claimed by the king instead. At the age of twenty Jamyang Khyentse fulfilled

his duties by travelling to Ngor monastery and receiving teachings from the head abbot. But he seemed to have little interest in staying there. Indeed, he showed his independence when he chose to take his full monastic vows at the Nyingma monastery of Mindroling instead.²⁶

Nor did Khyentse want to settle down at Mindroling. Instead he set off with a few provisions and one monk attendant on a journey across Tibet, visiting monasteries and sacred sites. He was on a mission. Having seen for himself how the great Gelug institutions had pushed the smaller traditions further and further into the corners of Tibet's cultural life, he feared that the great variety of tantric teachings that had been preserved in these other traditions would simply vanish. His aim now was to gather as many Buddhist texts as he could, but this was not just a matter of collecting physical books. In Tibetan Buddhism, as in most traditions of Buddhism, religious texts are rarely studied or put into practice without a ritual transmission, known in Tibetan as *lung*, which must be made by somebody who has previously received it. The person giving the transmission may offer an oral explanation of the text, or simply read through it. Either way, it authorises the one who receives it to study and pass on the text to others. If the line of transmission is broken, texts are no longer alive – they become 'mere books'.²⁷

So when Khyentse wrote in his autobiography that he received the transmissions for over seven hundred volumes, a Tibetan reader would understand the effort that he had had to put into this project – not just finding and collecting the books, but sitting and listening to seven hundred volumes being read aloud. And this was not done in one place, but in monasteries, hermitages and caves all over Tibet, at the feet of both sumptuously dressed abbots and ragged mendicants. In this way Khyentse collected hundreds of rare transmissions that would otherwise have died out within a generation or two. With characteristic humility he wrote, 'I put only a handful of these into practice, and understood just the basics'.²⁸

This life of wandering lasted for thirteen years. When Khyentse finally returned to Derge for good he was thirty-three years old. He set up his own temple with a small but comfortable room in which to live, meditate and teach, and swore never to cross the threshold again. This was not entirely realistic; among other things, his connections to the Derge royal family meant that he was subject to the occasional summons to court, and in later life he was appointed to the Derge government. Still, most of the rest of Khyentse's life was spent in these small meditation quarters, and it was here that he met the man

who was to prove a kindred spirit and the other most important figure in the cultural revival of Eastern Tibet: Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye.

The two men shared a similar background. Kongtrul was from an aristocratic Derge family, though they had fallen on hard times and had recently been decimated by a vicious blood feud. For all that his family was from a Bonpo background and he had developed an early interest in the Nyingma approach to Buddhism, Kongtrul was claimed by the Kagyu school, being recognised as a reincarnation of one of the attendants of Situ Panchen at the late age of twenty-one. Thus he was already well versed in the texts of several schools by the time he met Khyentse, and believed strongly in the validity of them all. In Khyentse he thought he saw the embodiment of the nonsectarian approach to the Buddha's teachings that he himself was striving to achieve. It was something he had seen in few other lamas, as he wrote later:

These days, even among famous lamas and teachers, there are not many who have a pure regard for the teachings of the Sage in their totality, apart from their own traditions and a few scriptures. There are few who have been willing to study with everyone, whether exalted or lowly, and there is little real knowledge of the dharma. Especially in these later times there are a great many who, while they themselves are not perfectly upright and lack a spiritual outlook, talk like arrogant bullies about whether a particular teaching tradition is any good or whether a lineage is pure. Never mind other traditions; they are full of qualms and doubts about the basics of their own tradition, like the proverbial one-eyed yak who startles himself.²⁹

Though Kongtrul was the older of the two, he considered Khyentse his teacher and attributed all the successes of his later career to him. And what an incredible career it turned out to be. While Khyentse was like a human library of rare Buddhist texts, Kongtrul's biggest strength was as an editor and a writer. His great achievement was to put together the five works known as 'the five great treasures'. This idea first came to Khyentse in a dream of a stupa with four doors around its square base, and one in its vase-shaped reliquary; inside the stupa were beautiful religious objects and books. A presence in the dream explained to Khyentse that these books were the five treasures.

Relating his dream to Kongtrul, Khyentse suggested that the first of the treasures would be a collection of rare terma texts that the two had been putting together: this came to be called *The Treasury of Precious Terma*. Over the next

few years Kongtrul edited further collections of rare texts including *The Treasury of Oral Instructions*, on the essence of meditation from a variety of schools and near-extinct traditions, an expression of Khyentse and Kongtrul's nonsectarian ideals. Kongtrul's greatest achievement as an author was the *Treasury of Everything There Is to Be Known*, a vast encyclopaedia which he hoped would prove that all of Buddhist scripture and scholarship culminates in the view and realisation of the Great Perfection.³⁰

Using his connections at court, Khyentse got many of these volumes printed in the Derge printing house. It seemed that Khyentse and Kongtrul had really succeeded in breathing fresh life into the embers of a dying culture. Yet within a few years both were caught up in one of the worst wars to hit Kham in centuries, a war that threatened everything they had been working towards. It began with a local chieftain from the tiny tribe of Nyarong, to the east of Derge, who began raiding and conquering his neighbours in the 1830s. The chieftain was a fierce warrior, with no interest in anything but conquest. The nature of his merciless campaign is well expressed in his motto: 'Kill everybody in sight so that all who have ears may hear of it.' By 1860, he had conquered his way to the borders of Derge.³¹

Interestingly, despite the obvious threat the chieftain posed to the kingdom of Derge, Kongtrul accompanied the Karmapa to perform a funeral for his son and confer tantric empowerment upon him. They were among many lamas summoned to perform services for this Nyarong chieftain, whose commitment to Buddhism did not preclude mass murder, although he knew enough about the doctrine of karma to ask all the lamas who came to him where he was bound in the next life. Only one, the Nyingma abbot of Dzogchen monastery, was brave enough to tell the chieftain that he was bound for hell, although he immediately agreed to perform a ritual to save the chieftain from this fate for one further lifetime.³²

Less than two years later the chieftain of Nyarong stormed into Derge. Now Khyentse and Kongtrul were asked to go to the Derge palace to perform rituals for the queen and the young prince. Khyentse had been seriously ill and could not answer the summons, so Kongtrul went alone with a heavy heart, remembering that when he had performed the ritual for the prince's birth, he had dreamed that Derge was filled with soldiers and the palace had been burned down. He spent a month at the palace, performing rituals until the chamberlain informed him that there were no more funds to support his stay there. So Kongtrul returned to his hermitage and continued to

perform rituals for peace. When he could, he worked on his *Treasury of Precious Terma*.

Soon after Kongtrul left the palace, the queen and the prince fled Derge. There was little hope at the court of defeating the Nyarong army, and sure enough, after bloody battles and much slaughter, Derge fell to the chieftain in 1863. Kongtrul heard stories of the deaths of many friends and patrons, and when news arrived that the queen and prince had been captured and taken hostage, he was distraught.³³ He wrote letters to Khyentse, who remained at his own temple writing letters back every month or so about any dreams or omens he had experienced that might be significant.

Meanwhile, news of the catastrophe had reached Central Tibet. Though Derge was officially part of China's Sichuan province, the Manchu empire was in its dying days. Kham had enjoyed a *de facto* independence for many years, and the Manchus had neither the will nor the means to expel a rogue chieftain. So the responsibility for restoring order to Kham fell to the Central Tibetan government, which responded by sending an army 'so large,' according to Kongtrul, 'that heaven and earth seemed to shake.' Once again Kongtrul received a summons, this time to perform rituals for the Tibetan army itself. He met the general and offered him a ceremonial scarf, and began the ritual offerings to the fierce protector deities. But as soon as he had finished, the Nyarong chieftain attacked. Kongtrul experienced a clamour and mental agitation that reminded him of what he had read of the sufferings of the bardo, the state between death and rebirth. During a pause in the fighting, the commander asked Kongtrul to perform a divination regarding where the Nyarong army would attack next. Since he knew of no techniques for doing this, Kongtrul just said the first thing that came into his head.

Luckily (if it was luck), he was right. The Tibetan commander, following Kongtrul's advice, was victorious, and afterwards congratulated Kongtrul warmly. Seizing the moment, Kongtrul got the commander to promise to spare the great Kagyu monastery of Palpung, which was suspected of having been an ally of the Nyarong chieftain. It was a wise move. The Tibetan army fought the Nyarong chieftain back to his own fort, which was then set on fire, killing him and his family. The queen and the prince returned to Derge, and an office of the Central Tibetan government was set up in Nyarong to keep an eye on Derge and the surrounding kingdoms. The Derge people were grateful to the Tibetan army, but after a while its heavy-handed presence in Kham made it unpopular. The punishments meted out to lamas and monasteries that were

seen to have supported the Nyarong chieftain were harsh, and further convinced the Khampas of the authoritarian nature of the Lhasa government. Khyentse, who was wealthy in his own right and now had a seat on the council of Derge, made sure that money was spent on rebuilding the damaged monasteries.

With hindsight, we can see that the trials of Khyentse and Kongtrul as they tried to save the disappearing traditions of Tibetan Buddhism foreshadowed the greater disasters of the next century. Without Khyentse and Kongtrul's collecting and printing of rare works, the suppression of Buddhism by the Communists would have been much more final. When the lamas of Kham prepared to flee their homelands and wondered which were the most important books to save for posterity, the answer was obvious: it had to be the collections of Khyentse and Kongtrul.

WHOSE GAME?

By the close of the nineteenth century, British India was very different from what it had been in the days of Warren Hastings and George Bogle. The gentleman merchants of the eighteenth century had been replaced by the government bureaucrats of the nineteenth. India was no longer merely a source of income for the East India Company; it was the jewel in the crown of the British empire. Of course, British rule in India was still about profit, but this fact was hidden under the pompous ceremonies of colonial rule and the self-justifying rhetoric of British imperialism. The belief that British rule was for the good of the 'natives' had been drummed into the young men who were sent out to administer British India.

George Nathaniel Curzon (or, to give him his proper title at the time, His Excellency the Right Honourable the Lord Curzon of Kedleston) had received a traditional upper-class British education at the hands of a sadistic governess, Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. He was an accomplished politician, and a keen analyst of Britain's role in the East, on which he had already written several books including *Persia and the Persian Question* and *Problems of the Far East*. The latter was dedicated 'to those who believe that the British Empire is, under Providence, the greatest instrument for good that the world has seen and who hold, with the writer, that its work in the Far East is not yet accomplished.'³⁴

Whether or not he really believed that the British empire was ordained by divine providence, Curzon was certain that its greatest enemy was Russia, which

had expanded its empire throughout the nineteenth century, annexing most of Central Asia in the process. This struggle between the British and Russian empires in the nineteenth century (which the British liked to refer to as 'the Great Game') had already caused two wars in Afghanistan. In another of his books, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question*, Curzon had declared his intention to protect British India from Russian expansionism: 'Whatever be Russia's designs upon India, whether they be serious and inimical or imaginary and fantastic, I hold that the first duty of English statesmen is to render any hostile intentions futile, to see that our own position is secure, and our frontier impregnable, and so to guard what is without doubt the noblest trophy of British genius, and the most splendid appendage of the Imperial Crown.'³⁵

By the time Curzon was appointed viceroy of India in 1898, a role he had long coveted, he was pretty certain that the Russian threat was neither imaginary nor fantastic. Keeping the Russians a safe distance from India was very much on his agenda. Afghanistan had become a useful buffer state between India and the Russian empire; Curzon saw Tibet in very much the same role. The British had been edging closer to Tibet throughout the nineteenth century. Bhutan and Nepal had fought futile wars before succumbing to British treaties, though they remained independent states.

And then there was Sikkim. The British had taken Darjeeling from Sikkim in 1860, and had been gradually increasing their influence in the country ever since. In 1887, the British political officer had installed himself there, essentially deposing the king and turning the country into his own personal fiefdom. Since Sikkim had been under the protection of Tibet, the Tibetan government took this badly and soldiers were despatched to the Sikkimese border. The skirmishes that resulted in a Tibetan defeat in 1888 were the first time British and Tibetan soldiers had met on the battlefield. After the Sikkim affair, the British negotiated with the Chinese ambans and drew up a border treaty in 1890, and trade regulations in 1893. No Tibetans had been present at these negotiations, and the Tibetan government had no intention of being bound by them. Thus Curzon quickly came to the conclusion that Chinese authority in Tibet was little more than a 'constitutional fiction'.³⁶

Impatient by nature, Curzon decided that the only way to open communications with Tibet was through direct contact with the Dalai Lama. In the first three years of his rule, three letters were drafted, written on official paper with impressive wax seals and sent via various intermediaries to the Dalai Lama. Each one was returned unread, its seals unbroken. For Curzon, this was not

just supremely irritating, but a snub to the honour of the British government. It was a startling anachronism, he complained, that in the twentieth century there should be a neighbour of British India with whom it was impossible even to engage in written communication.³⁷

But most galling of all were the reports that started coming Curzon's way of a diplomatic embassy from the Dalai Lama to the tsar in 1901, headed by monk called Dorjiev. This monk was a Mongol from Russia, who had come to Tibet and risen through the ranks to secure the coveted post of tutor to the Dalai Lama. He soon became one of the Dalai Lama's most trusted advisors on political as well as religious matters. Together, Dorjiev and the Dalai Lama conceived a plan to free Tibet from its reliance on China through an alliance with Russia. Dorjiev was more worldly-wise than anyone else in Lhasa: he had already travelled as far as Paris, where he had given teachings to a crowd of fascinated Parisians at the Musée Guimet. So he was the obvious choice when the Dalai Lama decided to send a diplomatic mission to St Petersburg.

In the end the tsar had promised nothing to Tibet, but an illusion can be more powerful than reality, and the press in Russia and Britain had run wildly speculative stories about the mission. In London, *The Times* presented it as the first step towards a bilateral alliance between Russia and Tibet. The Russian government itself was quite open about Dorjiev's visit, and informed the British Foreign Office about the negotiations. But this did little to allay the habitual suspicion of Russia in the minds of Great Gamers like Curzon.³⁸

And then there were the reports coming out of Tibet itself. For the last few decades the British had been sending Indian spies known as 'pundits' to Tibet. One of the most successful, Sarat Chandra Das, had been told by a Japanese monk living in Lhasa that the Russians had sent boxes of guns to the Tibetans. This piece of secondhand news was fuel on the fire for Curzon, who had become certain that Russian rifles were stockpiled in Lhasa. As for the Tibetan government, the discovery that a British spy had penetrated Lhasa had only served to increase fear and suspicion of Britain's intentions. The Tibetans who had helped Chandra Das were subjected to public beatings and execution, and attitudes to the British had hardened even more. Little wonder that they wanted nothing to do with Curzon's letters.³⁹

So Curzon began to contemplate a military advance into Tibet, turning to an old friend and fellow Great Gamer, Francis Younghusband. The two had travelled together in Afghanistan and shared the same conviction in the essential goodness of the British empire and the need to defend it against the Russian

threat. But Younghusband was also quite different from Curzon: where Curzon was a clear-headed and ruthless political animal, Younghusband was a dreamer, a mystic and an enthusiast for new theories of all kinds. Having toiled for some years in fairly lowly posts in India, Younghusband was ready for something better and latched on to Curzon. Eagerly consuming the latest thoughts of those philosophers who supported the British imperial project, he discussed with Curzon the duty of the British to govern the 'inferior races'.⁴⁰

Ideas of the latter kind were becoming less and less popular among politicians back in Britain. The bloody Boer War had sapped resources and left thousands of soldiers dead, while the establishment of concentration camps had tarnished Britain's reputation. For many, the Boer War marks the end of the high period of the British empire. With little taste for further military adventures, the British government instead concentrated on forming alliances with the other major world powers. In such a climate, Curzon's urgent demands for a military expedition to Tibet were met with little enthusiasm, even with open hostility. For two years, however, Curzon worked on the government, until at last, in 1903, he got clearance to send a force to Khamba Dzong, just inside the Tibetan border, to negotiate directly with the Tibetans. He immediately asked Younghusband to lead the expedition. Younghusband, highly excited by the prospect, got the distinct impression that what Curzon really intended was an invasion that would penetrate all the way to Lhasa itself, where the Dalai Lama could finally be brought to the negotiating table.

Riding up through Darjeeling and Gangtok, Younghusband crossed the Tibetan border on 18 July 1903 with five hundred soldiers. Back in Lhasa, there was no chance that the government would allow the Dalai Lama to go and negotiate directly. Instead, a senior politician and a general were despatched, joined by one of the Chinese ambans, and they bore just one message: nothing was to be discussed until the British went back to Sikkim, beyond the Tibetan border. Having delivered it, they retired to the local fort (the dzong) and refused to come out again. The amban, who lacked any genuine political power in Lhasa, made his excuses and left.

Younghusband was left kicking his heels, but tried to spend his time profitably by reading through the books on Tibet that he had bought in Calcutta. The work that struck him most was George Bogle's travel diary. Younghusband saw himself following in Bogle's footsteps and nourished a keen ambition to go one better than Bogle by reaching Lhasa. But he was becoming increasingly frustrated, caught between the diplomatic stonewalling of the Tibetans and the

resistance to the expedition among the politicians back in London. He sought out rumours that would justify a further advance into Tibet, claiming in one letter that the Tibetans were poised to invade India and would be joined imminently by twenty thousand Russian soldiers.

Such scaremongering did not have much impact in London, and Curzon knew that a better case could be made using the minor infringements by the Tibetans of the new Tibet–Sikkim border. Recently two Sikkimese working as British spies had been captured by the Tibetans; Curzon arranged for their families to petition the British government. Then some Tibetans crossed the Sikkim border and carried off a few Nepalese yaks. Curzon made the most of this minor yak-rustling incident, writing, ‘We now learn that Tibetan troops attacked Nepalese yaks on the frontier and carried many of them off. This is an overt act of hostility.’⁴¹

The drip-feed of rumour and minor incidents presented as major provocations eventually had its effect, and on 6 November 1903 the secretary of state for India sent a telegram giving permission for the expedition to go further into Tibet, to the town of Gyantse, with the sole purpose of ‘obtaining satisfaction’. Nobody, least of all Younghusband, was quite sure what this meant, and the vagueness of the phrase was to work to his benefit once he reached Gyantse. But, with hindsight, ‘obtaining satisfaction’ – a euphemism for the not entirely extinct British custom of duelling – reveals one thing: that it was not primarily Russophobia, nor Curzon’s cooked-up pretexts, that brought the British army into Tibet, but honour. The repeated snub of the letters to the Dalai Lama being returned unopened was what provoked Curzon to think of invasion. And then the Tibetan refusal to negotiate at Khamba Dzong left Younghusband and his men in a distinctly awkward position. One thing that imperialists such as Curzon and Younghusband could not bear was that the British empire should be made to look foolish.

Though Curzon would not say it in so many words, journalists were less circumspect. In his report on the invasion, the *Daily Mail* journalist Edmund Candler wrote:

The conduct of Great Britain in her relations with Tibet puts me in mind of the dilemma of a big boy at school who submits to the attacks of a precocious youngster rather than incur the imputation of ‘bully’. At last the situation becomes intolerable, and the big boy, bully if you will, turns on the youth and administers the deserved thrashing. There is naturally a good deal of

remonstrance from spectators who have not observed the by-play which led to the encounter. But sympathy must be sacrificed to the restitution of fitting and respectful relations.⁴²

Candler well represented the views of Curzon and Younghusband, if not those of the British parliament.

SHOCK AND AWE

As soon as he had the go-ahead, Younghusband gathered his troops and retreated across the border to Sikkim. The Tibetans may have thought that their strategy of waiting out the British had come good, but the retreat was only a pause in order to assemble an army for a full-scale invasion (even if nobody was calling it by that name). On 13 December 1903, Younghusband crossed into Tibet again, this time with 2,500 soldiers, mostly Gurkhas and Sikhs under the command of British officers, and some 10,000 'sepoys', or porters. The mission now had a ranking general as well, General MacDonald, who irritated Younghusband and his camp with his caution. He was also joined by Captain Frank O'Connor, one of the few British officers who spoke Tibetan. Younghusband fired off a last-minute telegram to Curzon expressing his certainty that Dorjiev was in Lhasa, that Russian weapons were in Tibet and that the Russians had promised military support to the Tibetans.

Also joining the mission were a number of Englishmen coming along for the ride, lured by the prospect of being the first Westerners to set foot in Lhasa. They included Candler, along with reporters for *The Times* and other papers, and Laurence Austine Waddell, British India's only Tibetologist. Waddell was the author of *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, an ill-informed and aggressively unsympathetic account of Tibetan Buddhism. Like Younghusband, he was keen on racial theory, and later wrote a pamphlet on the 'Aryan Origin of the World's Civilizations'. He had got himself onto the mission mainly in order to procure as many Tibetan manuscripts as possible, although his official post was as chief of the mission's medical team.⁴³

Over the next few weeks the army proceeded slowly, but with little resistance, towards Gyantse. Meanwhile, in Lhasa a struggle was going on between the political factions in the government. The Kashag, the ruling council, included a minister called Shatra who had extensive experience of British India. He thought that it was futile to fight the British army and pushed for a

diplomatic settlement. But he was opposed by the National Assembly, a much larger body that included the abbots of Lhasa's three major monasteries. Nobody in the National Assembly had the least understanding of the modern military might of the British army, and they insisted that the Tibetans should fight. There was a general feeling that the British were the worst of all enemies, in that they were enemies of Buddhism. The National Assembly then turned on the ministers of the Kashag, who were arrested on trumped-up charges of treachery and replaced with ministers who supported military action.⁴⁴

The scene was set for some kind of massacre. The British army had modern rifles, cannons and the terrifying Maxim machine guns, which could fire six hundred bullets a minute. Recent British successes in colonial warfare had depended heavily on Maxim guns, a fact that the writer Hilaire Belloc had referred to a few years earlier in his satirical description of a British colonial ruler:

He stood upon a little mound,
Cast his lethargic eyes around,
And said beneath his breath:
'Whatever happens, we have got
The Maxim Gun, and they have not.'⁴⁵

As for the Tibetan soldiers, they were armed only with elderly matchlock rifles and printed charms blessed by the Dalai Lama. Neither was to prove the least bit effective. As Younghusband's mission advanced, the Tibetan government sent some 1,500 men who built a makeshift stone wall at some hot springs near the little village of Guru. During the next few weeks Younghusband attempted to engage the Tibetans in serious negotiations, now aided by the Tongsa Ponlop, administrator and future king of Bhutan, who was acting as an intermediary. But, following the sacking of the entire Kashag, the Tibetan government was determined to avoid talks. Hence, on the morning of 31 March, a contingent of the British army advanced to the Tibetan encampment at the springs.

As the British army approached the perimeter wall, a lone figure rode towards them across the plain. It was the commander of the Tibetan army, General Lhading. He sat down with Younghusband, General MacDonald and Captain O'Connor. Both sides expressed their peaceful intentions, but refused to budge. Younghusband told the Tibetan general that he had a quarter of an hour in which to surrender. The general rode back to the wall; shortly

afterwards the British army advanced. Neither side fired a shot, and within a few minutes the Tibetans were surrounded: mounted infantry behind them, Gurkhas to the left, Sikhs to the right and the deadly Maxim guns facing them down.

Looking around for the Tibetan general in order to accept his surrender, Younghusband was astonished to find him in front of the stone wall, sitting at the feet of the Sikh regiment. He refused to speak to Younghusband, instead muttering darkly to himself. Accepting this as an implicit surrender, Younghusband ordered the Sikhs to start disarming the Tibetans. It seemed to be over. Younghusband began to write a telegram to London informing the authorities of the bloodless victory. The British officers, as well as Candler and Waddell, walked right up to the wall to have a look at the Tibetan soldiers. One of the latter even handed his rifle over the wall to Waddell, who wanted to examine it.

That soldier was expecting his rifle back. Most Tibetan men owned their own guns and, ancient as they were, they were much prized. None of these Tibetan soldiers wanted to surrender their weapons and the Tibetan general, while not ordering them to fire, had not issued an order to relinquish their guns either. Some pushing and pulling therefore started between the Sikhs attempting to take the guns and the Tibetans holding onto them. Then a gun went off. It was hardly surprising that such creaky weaponry should fire in a situation like this, but the result was a disaster for the Tibetans. The British troops were given the order to fire and the Maxim guns ripped into the massed Tibetans, who fell where they stood. Those who were still standing turned their backs and started to walk away.⁴⁶

This stunned the British. Candler, positioned right next to the wall when the firing started, was attacked by two Tibetan swordsmen and lost a hand, one of the worst of the few injuries on the British side. As his wound was being dressed he watched the Tibetans die. He later wrote of his astonishment: 'They were walking away! Why, in the name of all their Bodhisats and Munis, did they not run? There was cover behind a bend in the hill a few hundred yards distant, and they were exposed to a devastating hail of bullets from the Maxims and rifles, that seemed to mow down every third or fourth man, yet they walked!'⁴⁷ The answer to Candler's question may just be that the Tibetan soldiers had no frame of reference for what was happening to them. They had no experience of modern weaponry, and no expectation that they might be shot down so quickly, and at so great a range. Younghusband and several

others on the British side expressed their dismay at the slaughter they had carried out. Here at the hot springs the Tibetan general and his men met the reality that their government had been trying to protect them from, and it was evident that Tibet lacked anything like the resources needed to fight off an invasion from a modern army. The Tibetan general, who had consulted the works of the tenth-century Tibetan king Yeshe O before he rode out to meet Younghusband, was operating in an entirely different world from that of the British officers who opposed him.

The British now advanced to Gyantse, where Younghusband, increasingly frustrated at the continued unwillingness of the Tibetans to engage in serious talks (yet another official letter to the Dalai Lama was sent back unopened), wrote to the viceroy insisting that an advance on Lhasa itself was the only solution. Despite deep opposition to this among the British government, permission was at last given. It was now July 1904, and Younghusband had been in Tibet for months, yet the Tibetan government still hoped that its diplomatic stonewalling would eventually persuade him to leave. That hope was now to be destroyed, as the British army advanced on the great fortified monastery at Gyantse. After intensive shelling, the fort's powder keg was hit directly and exploded. The Gurkhas scrambled up the steep rockface and into the fort, and it was taken by the British.

At last the Tibetan government came to understand that it had got it wrong. It had to face the fact that the British had not only the will but also the means to conquer Tibet. There was a sudden about-face as the Dalai Lama quickly wrote a letter to the Tongsa Ponlop, the Bhutanese intermediary, to say that 'negotiations for establishing friendship should begin immediately'. But Younghusband was tired of fruitless waiting around. Reaching Lhasa was in any case the goal he had had in mind when he first entered Tibet, and now that it was so close, it was hardly likely that he would give it up.

As the army advanced, the Dalai Lama considered his options. The real fear among the Tibetans was that Younghusband, while outwardly paying homage to the Dalai Lama, would gradually erode Tibet's autonomy until it became just another British dependency and the Dalai Lama a feeble puppet. This, after all, was what had happened in Sikkim.⁴⁸ So, at the end of July, leaving his seals of office with the head of Ganden monastery, the Dalai Lama changed into Mongol clothes and rode north with a few close associates, including Dorjiev and the Nechung oracle. The oracle, a Nyingma monk who served as a medium for the deity Dorje Dragden, delivered this message as the party fled:

Urged on by spirits and demons,
 The misguided British with their wealth and manpower
 Came to this Snowy Land surrounded by mountains
 With their barbaric army.
 These events, the like of which I've never seen,
 Have broken the heart of this old devil.⁴⁹

As the Dalai Lama and his entourage rode in haste towards Mongolia, Younghusband and his army marched through the gates of Lhasa. The British officers and troops paraded through the city, putting on a grand show of imperial might. Younghusband, who thought of the lamas as despotic oppressors of ordinary Tibetans, wrote home that the British had been met with clapping and cheering by the people of Lhasa. In fact, the apparent greeting was actually a traditional method of bringing down rain and repelling evil spirits. As one amused Tibetan noted, 'In the foreigner's custom these are seen as signs of welcome, so they took off their hats and said thank you.'⁵⁰

Considering the dire warnings that Younghusband and Curzon had made about Russian military aid to Tibet, it was deeply embarrassing to find no Russian guns, no troops, not even a single Russian resident in Lhasa. All that was left was to negotiate with the Ganden throne-holder, who readily agreed to Younghusband's terms. These included promises not to engage in treaties with other foreign countries (i.e. Russia), and to allow a British trade-mart at Gyantse, where a representative of the British government was to be stationed. Younghusband was unconcerned by the absence of the Dalai Lama and encouraged the amban's idea of deposing him. He thought of the Dalai Lama as another young chief like those he had known in India, too immature to be given real responsibilities – the usual British colonial justification for annexing smaller states. And so the abbot of Ganden signed the agreement and the deed was done. Plans were immediately made for returning home. The morning after the signing ceremony, Younghusband walked out into the hills around Lhasa and suddenly found himself overcome with an inexpressible joy: 'All nature and all humanity were bathed in a rosy glowing radiancy.'

Younghusband was to spend the rest of his life writing increasingly religious works arguing for, among other things, free love and the existence of extraterrestrial beings. Some have suggested that this mystical experience in Lhasa acted as a kind of conversion. But in fact Younghusband, always mystically inclined, had written of feelings like this before, and was compiling notes for a

book entitled *Religion of a Traveller* throughout the Tibet expedition. At the same time, his lack of curiosity about the actual nature of Tibetan Buddhism is striking. His later works have much in common with the misty-eyed spiritualism that was popular in England in the early twentieth century, and very little with the Buddhism of Tibet, of which he was deeply critical: 'And the evil of Lamaism is that it has fostered lazy repose and self-suppression at the expense of useful activity and self-realization. . . . Peace, instead of harmony, has been their ideal – peace for the emasculated individual instead of harmony for the united and full-blooded whole.'⁵¹

Back in London, harmony was equally hard to find. On his arrival home Younghusband discovered that the popular enthusiasm for his expedition to Lhasa did not extend to Whitehall, where the British government was displeased with how far he had exceeded his initial orders and horrified by a treaty that would embroil Britain in Tibet for the next seventy-five years. To Younghusband's dismay, the terms of his treaty were watered down, with the occupation of the Tibetan border cut to a mere three years. The only lasting benefit for the British was the stationing of two trade agents and a telegraph wire in Tibet.

The Manchu government also quickly got involved, and the end result was a rewritten treaty implying that China had a right to Tibet. As a *Times* correspondent wrote: 'The end of it all will be that China will have climbed back into Tibet on Younghusband's shoulders!' Indeed, Younghusband's expedition had forced the Manchu government to consider how exposed its almost nonexistent influence in Tibet had left it. It had also caused a serious loss of face. The restoration of national security and national pride would play a huge part in the Chinese approach to Tibet in the twentieth century. But it would not have an easy time of it. One man, the thirteenth Dalai Lama, had a different vision for Tibet.⁵²



8

Independence, 1904–1950

THE WANDERING DALAI LAMA

While Francis Younghusband was anxiously awaiting the announcement of the Honours List in London a long camel train approached the capital of Mongolia. It was November 1904, and the thirteenth Dalai Lama had spent the last three months trekking across the frozen plains of Northern Tibet and the arid deserts of Central Asia. Though he had left Lhasa with just eight companions, his entourage had grown to several hundred people by the time it approached Urga. The highest reincarnate lama of Mongolia, the Jetsun Dampa, sent a palanquin for the Dalai Lama as he approached the capital city. With crowds thronging either side of the road, the Dalai Lama held two scarves that touched the heads of the faithful as the palanquin passed by.

Once he had settled into his new quarters in Urga, the Dalai Lama began the usual round of receiving visitors and bestowing blessings. Meanwhile, his right-hand man, Dorjiev, set off for St Petersburg to ask the tsar for help against the British menace. Dorjiev did not manage to arrange an audience until early 1906, when, once again, the tsar was evasive. Of course, he assured Dorjiev, Russia would help Tibet, but considering the recent losses in its war with Japan such help would have to be gradual in nature. The tsar did promise to help by negotiating with China and Britain, but as this was something Russia was going to have to do anyway, it hardly represented going out on a limb to assist Tibet.

Also on the table during Dorjiev's audience with the tsar was the issue of the ninth Panchen Lama, who seemed to be making a play to rule Tibet in the Dalai Lama's absence. The British, who remembered how much further George Bogle had got with the Panchen Lama than the Dalai Lama in the eighteenth century, had already been planning to cultivate him. In 1906, the Panchen Lama visited British India, where he met the viceroy, Lord Minto. The Russians were concerned about this, just as the British were concerned when reports of Dorjiev's latest encounter with the tsar filtered through to them. The Manchu court was jittery too. A fairly innocuous telegram from the tsar to the Dalai Lama, expressing nothing more than esteem for his spiritual qualities, alarmed the Chinese so much that they sent a special diplomatic mission to the Dalai Lama to warn him that if he intrigued with Russian officials he would be deposed.

And so nearly two years passed while the Dalai Lama waited in Urga for the Russian response. Why did he not return to Lhasa sooner? For one thing, he knew that the Tibetan government could get on very well without him. After all, it had been doing so for years – throughout the nineteenth century, the regents had held the young Dalai Lamas back from power, even killing them when necessary. The thirteenth Dalai Lama had grown up in an atmosphere of political intrigue, trying to make sense of a role that was always an uncomfortable hybrid of spiritual and political power, and one that many preferred to see as merely symbolic. The only previous Dalai Lama who had been able to wield power effectively was the Great Fifth, and that was with the military support of the Mongols. This may be why the thirteenth Dalai Lama now chose to tarry in the homelands of the Mongols. Indeed, the thirteenth had something of the Great Fifth about him. He had turned out to be a fine scholar in the Gelug academic tradition, becoming the first of the Dalai Lamas to be awarded the highest academic title of Geshe Lharampa. But he was also a visionary who, like the Great Fifth, often experienced vivid dreams of Padmasambhava.

Still, his years in Lhasa had not been easy. The Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi, who visited the Tibetan capital in the early years of the twentieth century, spent some time with the Dalai Lama and expressed great pity for him, surrounded as he was by ambitious and unscrupulous political climbers: 'Hence he is so dangerously situated, that he is obliged to pay the greatest attention to what is offered him to eat, lest some poison should have been put in. I could not but shed tears for him, when I thought that there could be no court on earth so full of wicked courtiers. But the present Dalai Lama is so

prudent and particular that these evil-doers can get no chance of doing anything against him.¹

The Japanese monk may have been exaggerating a little, but his feelings of pity were not unfounded. In 1900, the Dalai Lama had narrowly escaped a series of assassination attempts by the regent. One attempt might have been comical, had it not been deadly serious – folded-up pieces of paper covered with black mantras were discovered hidden inside the soles of a pair of shoes intended for the Dalai Lama. In the end, the regent was caught and charged, and his accomplices were executed. The affair left a lasting wound in Lhasa politics. There were many who supported the regent, and believed that the charges against him were just a way of clearing the old political class out of Lhasa. The monks of the regent's monastery of Tengyeling now became implacable opponents of the Dalai Lama. In the years to come they would fight him alongside Chinese soldiers, but for now the worst thing that came from Tengyeling was a false prophecy stating that the current Dalai Lama would be the last.²

We can now see why the Dalai Lama might have been less than keen to return to Lhasa after the British army pulled out. Yet things were getting uncomfortable in Urga as well. His host was the eighth Jetsun Dampa, who despite being infamous as a drinker and womaniser was still the most highly regarded reincarnate lama in Mongolia. He was jealous of the attention received by the Dalai Lama, and in a fit of pique, went into the Dalai Lama's audience chamber and pulled his throne to pieces. After this he became openly disrespectful, languidly lighting cigarettes and smoking in front of him. And then there were the Manchu ambans, who made it clear that they did not want a Dalai Lama living in Mongolia. In one tense meeting, the ambans told the Dalai Lama that he and his entourage were a strain on local resources. The Dalai Lama shouted at them: 'In my twelve years of ruling Tibet, I have made a close enough study of you Manchus. I know you well and I will not let you mock me any longer!'³

It was clearly time to move on. At the beginning of 1906, the Dalai Lama began a long, leisurely eastward journey. Travelling through Amdo, the thirteenth, like so many before him, received the adulation of ordinary people and monks and the abundant gifts of officials and high lamas. But the Manchu court was nervous about the Dalai Lama's tour; that summer it told the British legation: 'the Dalai Lama is wandering about. We hope eventually to find some temple where he can settle down.'⁴ In fact, the Dalai Lama had a temple in mind: Kumbum, the finest monastery in Amdo, pleasantly situated in the

midst of rolling green hills, the place where the Great Fifth had stayed on his way to meet the emperor. As he approached the monastery the Dalai Lama was met by a grand procession of a thousand lamas. He stayed over a year at Kumbum, enjoying the company of fine scholars, learning Sanskrit grammar and writing poetry. It was the last peace he was to know for a long, long time.

COLONISATION

As the ripples of the Younghusband expedition reached China, the Manchu government was convinced that the British might launch another invasion at any moment, and this time cross into China itself. The only way to prevent this was to take control of Tibet. As one Manchu official put it, 'Tibet is the buttress on our national frontiers – the hand, as it were, which protects the face.'⁵ The first step in making Tibet into a reliable buffer for China was to secure the wild and ungovernable Khampas. The man chosen for this task was Zhao Erfeng, a loyal servant of the Manchu empire with an imperialist's disdain for other cultures – almost Younghusband's mirror image. Leading a crack battalion, he cut a swathe through Batang and Litang, replacing local chiefs with Chinese officials and slaughtering those who opposed him with startling violence. The biggest obstacles to colonising Kham were the monasteries and their fighting monks, and Zhao attacked them mercilessly. The monastery of Sampeling, which belonged to the Gelug school, held out the longest. Zhao eventually ended the resistance in June 1906 by sending men into the monastery disguised as monks. After fierce fighting, the monastery surrendered and every one of its monks was executed.⁶

As scenes of this kind were repeated in monasteries across Kham, Zhao gained a fearsome reputation. The Khampas called him 'Zhao the Butcher'. But he saw himself quite differently. Like most Chinese of the time, he regarded Tibetans in general and Khampas in particular as barbarians, and saw himself as a bringer of civilisation. He compared the role of the Chinese in Kham to that of the British in Australia, the French in Madagascar and the Americans in the Philippines. Aiming to Sinicise Kham as quickly as possible, he encouraged Chinese farmers to emigrate in a proclamation telling them to 'hasten to this promising land'.⁷ New regulations were issued for the town of Batang, showing what the Manchus now had in mind for Tibet. These stated that all Tibetans there were now subjects of the Chinese emperor and Chinese

law, and were to pay their taxes to China. Monks were banned from local government, and monasteries were not to house more than three hundred monks. Tibetan men must wear Chinese clothes and the Manchu pigtail rather than the Khampa hairstyle 'which makes men resemble living demons'. The Tibetan families had to take Chinese surnames and a Chinese school was to be opened in Batang. This new approach was quite different from what the Khampas had seen before. It looked very much like colonisation.⁸

When news of these events reached the Dalai Lama in Kumbum, he was most disturbed. His response was the traditional one: he asked the monastery's lamas to teach him their most powerful rituals, which he personally performed for several days. Then came more disturbing news. In August 1907, the British and the Russians had signed an agreement. It seemed that both sides had lost interest in the Great Game, and that Russia had abandoned any thoughts of involvement with Tibet, agreeing now to recognise Britain's 'special interest in the maintenance of the status quo in the external relations of Tibet'. As his options narrowed, the Dalai Lama decided to travel to Beijing for an audience with the Manchu emperor. The great entourage set off through the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, stopping to pay its respects at holy sites such as the tomb of Gewasel, the monk who kept the monastic lineage alive during Tibet's dark age. The thirteenth Dalai Lama spoke warmly of this region, and this was recalled some thirty years later when the next Dalai Lama was found nearby.⁹

Finally, in the early autumn of 1908, the Dalai Lama stepped off the train in Beijing. At the Forbidden City there was the usual struggle over ceremony – would the Dalai Lama bow his head to the floor before the emperor, as the officials demanded? He insisted that he would not, and so after a few days of negotiation it was agreed instead that the emperor would stand to receive the Dalai Lama, who would touch the ground with his right knee. The audience was brief, polite and devoid of content, and a separate audience with Empress dowager Cixi, the real power behind the throne, went much the same way. When the Dalai Lama was presented with a seal by the emperor, he noticed that the flowery Chinese title had changed quite a bit from the one that was awarded to the Great Fifth. Gone were the phrases 'Universal Ruler of the Buddhist Faith' and 'Holder of the Sceptre'; in their place came 'Sincerely Obedient'.¹⁰

Another snub awaited when the Dalai Lama asked to have a more substantial conversation with the emperor about the relationship between China and

Tibet. He was simply told to go back to Lhasa to put his case before the amban there. In addition, the Dalai Lama's attempts to talk to foreign representatives in Beijing were treated as religious meetings, kept brief and always supervised by court officials. At no time was the Dalai Lama acknowledged as a representative of an independent country. Yet when Empress Dowager Cixi fell ill she did not hesitate to ask the Dalai Lama to perform a long-life ritual. He granted her request, but her illness worsened and she died. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, the young emperor died the day before her – poisoned, some said, by his own mother.¹¹

Leaving a troubled Beijing that December, the Dalai Lama was personally escorted by Puyi, the last emperor of the Manchu dynasty. The Tibetan party slowly wound its way towards Lhasa, unaware of the storm that was about to engulf it. Zhao the Butcher had been busy in Kham. He had taken over Derge and finally opened it up by building a modern road. He had also been making the case for sending troops further, into Lhasa itself. This, he argued, was the only way to prevent another British invasion. The Manchu government approved of this plan, and two thousand soldiers were sent towards Lhasa. Zhao was not with them, but was given his own troops, and spent the next two years conquering the rest of Kham.¹²

When rumours of Chinese soldiers moving towards Lhasa reached the Dalai Lama, he was appalled and despatched messages via the telegraph set up by the British. Yet he had no idea how to engage in modern international diplomacy: an angry telegram to the Foreign Office in Beijing had no effect. Another telegram was addressed to 'Great Britain and all the Ministers of Europe'; nobody knew quite what to do with that. On Christmas Day 1909, the Dalai Lama arrived back in Lhasa. He had been away for five years, but there was no time to settle in. Over the next few weeks posters began to appear on the walls of Lhasa stating that Chinese troops were coming to protect them from foreign invaders. When the Dalai Lama asked the amban what was going on, he was assured that no more than a thousand soldiers were coming to police the trade marts. But then, in February 1910, more than two thousand soldiers marched into Lhasa. Few tried to stop them, and some Tibetans even welcomed them. A letter was delivered to the Dalai Lama promising that he could retain his spiritual authority, but mentioning nothing of his secular powers.

Walled up in the Potala, the Dalai Lama and his ministers had a hurried meeting. They had heard that, whatever the amban was saying, the soldiers

had been ordered to capture the Dalai Lama. Even if this did not happen, he would end up permanently cloistered in the Potala, truly an impotent figure-head. So the Dalai Lama decided to flee again, less than two months after he had arrived back in Lhasa. At midnight he and those ministers who decided to throw in their lot with him left the Potala, and at dawn they rode out of Lhasa. Shortly afterwards the amban discovered that the Dalai Lama had slipped the net. Not knowing which way he had gone, he sent cavalry both north and south. In fact, the Dalai Lama was heading south; it was a sign of his desperation that he had decided to go to British India. At this stage he didn't know what to expect when he got there, but he hoped to get a boat to China and put his case before the emperor.¹³

IN THE LION'S LAIR

It was a hard, hard journey. The icy winds of February cut the Dalai Lama to the bone. At the ferry over the Tsangpo river two hundred soldiers caught up with his party, but were held back by a few Tibetans while the ferry crossed. As the Tibetan party rode up through the mountain passes, a heavy snow fell and the Dalai Lama fell ill with a cold. When he caught sight of his own reflection, his pallid face and cracked lips, he burst into tears. In this state he crossed the border into Sikkim, arriving in the unknown and much feared territory of British India. The two British soldiers who manned the telegraph office near the border were woken in the middle of the night by a knocking. Opening the door, they were surprised to see a group of very excited Tibetans saying, 'Dalai Lama! Dalai Lama!' One of the soldiers, whose name was Luff, blinked into the darkness and asked, 'Which of you blighters is the Dalai Lama?'

When the Dalai Lama came to the door, the soldiers tried to persuade the Tibetans to stay in a nearby bungalow rather than the tiny telegraph office, but they weren't keen. So Luff let the Dalai Lama in, seated him by the fire and made him a cup of tea. After he had recovered a bit, the Dalai Lama asked if he could use one of the soldiers' beds. Seeing their guns, he also asked if they would protect him if the Chinese attacked in the night. When the soldiers said that they would, he lay down and fell into his first deep sleep since fleeing Lhasa. The guns, in fact, were unloaded as no ammunition had arrived in the snowy weather. Still, in the morning the two soldiers, holding their empty rifles, escorted the Dalai Lama's party for a while before promising to see off any Chinese who crossed the border. After they said their goodbyes the two

sergeants remarked to each other, ‘Thank heaven we’ve got the Boss of Tibet off our bally hands safe and sound.’¹⁴

And so the Dalai Lama entered British India, passing through Sikkim and arriving in Darjeeling a mere nine days after his precipitous flight from Lhasa. Things were changing fast for the Dalai Lama, and this new exile would not be like the last, with its slow, stately and sumptuous processions. The Darjeeling authorities put the Dalai Lama in a hotel on the main street, where his attendants managed to fashion a throne among the modern European furnishings. Here, tired, ill, stripped of his fine clothes and with the barest bones of his entourage, the Dalai Lama met a representative of the British government in India. Charles Bell had just returned from a diplomatic mission in Bhutan when he was sent to meet the exiled Dalai Lama. A tall upper-class Englishman, Bell was a fluent speaker of Tibetan and sympathetic to Tibetan culture. He was to become of lifelong friend of the Dalai Lama.

Despite the inauspicious circumstances, Bell was impressed by his first meeting with the Tibetan leader: ‘Eyebrows curved high and a full moustache with the ends well waxed, accentuated the alertness of the administrator, rather than the priest meditating apart. His dark brown eyes were large and very prominent. They lit up as he spoke or listened, and his whole countenance shone with a quiet eagerness.’¹⁵ The first photographs of the Dalai Lama, taken around this time, match Bell’s description well. A few days later the Dalai Lama and his entourage were taken to Calcutta to meet the viceroy, Lord Minto. The Dalai Lama’s view of the British was changing. His biographer points to a well-known Buddhist maxim: ‘Enemies one day become friends the next; friends become enemies.’ Back in Lhasa, new posters appeared on the walls declaring that the thirteenth Dalai Lama was ‘proud, extravagant, lewd, slothful, vicious and perverse without parallel, violent and disorderly, disobedient to the imperial commands, and oppressive towards the Tibetans.’¹⁶

Most importantly, the posters also announced that he was to be stripped of his title and treated like an ordinary person, while a new Dalai Lama was to be selected by the amban using the golden urn. This last part of the order was never carried out; the amban knew how much trouble it would cause. The last time the Chinese had stripped the Dalai Lama of his title, when he first fled Lhasa in 1904, the act’s implications had been entirely ignored by the Tibetans. Still, the amban made several moves to bring Lhasa under his control, taking over the role of police and courts and ordering the minting of new coins with both Tibetan and Chinese writing.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in Calcutta the Dalai Lama met the viceroy, with Charles Bell acting as interpreter. The Dalai Lama tried to calm ongoing British suspicions about his relationship with Russia, telling Minto that Dorjiev had acted purely as a spiritual advisor to the tsar. The British also took the Tibetan party to the Calcutta zoo and, more significantly, to the Indian Museum, which held a recently discovered casket of the Buddha's relics thought to have been buried with the Buddhist emperor Kanishka in the second century AD. The Dalai Lama held the casket and blessed the Buddhists in the room, who included the prince of Sikkim and the exiled prince of Derge. On his return to Darjeeling the Dalai Lama declared that he and his entourage, which included several senior ministers, still represented the Tibetan government, even if it was a government in exile. Meanwhile, news came from Lhasa that the amban had broken the sealed doors of the Dalai Lama's official residence, the Norbulingka, and was replacing the Tibetan ministers with Manchu officials. The Dalai Lama sat and waited for a response from the British.

But the British were not inclined to get involved. For one thing, they were convinced that the Dalai Lama was still involved with Russia. Secret Foreign Office documents from this time set out a position that was to become sadly familiar to Tibetans throughout the twentieth century: 'A strictly non-committal attitude on all points at issue between China and Tibet is more than ever necessary at the present juncture.'¹⁸ So, on 4 May 1910, a telegram arrived from London for the viceroy, stating: 'Definite intimation should now be made to the Dalai Lama that there can be no interference between Tibetans and China on the part of His Majesty's Government.'¹⁹

A few days later Charles Bell came to the Dalai Lama's room with the bad news. After the pleasant surprise of his friendly reception in India, this was a shock to the Dalai Lama: 'When I delivered the message to him as we sat together in the quietude of his room, he was so surprised and distressed that for a minute or two he lost the power of speech. That deprecating look in his eyes became for an instant the look of a man who is being hunted to his doom. Quickly, however, he cast it off and discussed the matter calmly and clearly.'²⁰ Despite his disappointment, the Dalai Lama still felt that the British were his best allies in his plans to return to Tibet. When the amban, who had realised the hopelessness of appointing another Dalai Lama, sent him a letter suggesting that he return, the Dalai Lama replied with a strong criticism of what he saw as a betrayal by the emperor. 'Because of the above,' he wrote, 'it is not possible for China and Tibet to have the same relationship as before,'

and insisted that any new agreements would have to be made with British mediation.²¹

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

For now there was not much the Dalai Lama could do. He was cut off from what was going on in Tibet, where life had largely returned to normal. After all, the Dalai Lama had been absent from Lhasa for all but a few weeks of the last five years, and many Lhasa Tibetans were untroubled by the Chinese presence. So the Dalai Lama and his entourage decided to spend the first months of 1911 touring India's sacred Buddhist sites; making a trip to the birthplace of Buddhism without visiting these pilgrimage sites was hardly conceivable for a Tibetan Buddhist. The British did what they could to assist the pilgrims, providing horses, rickshaws, a motor car, even a train that stopped and started at the Dalai Lama's convenience.

At the Buddha's birthplace, Kapilavastu, the Tibetans were impressed by the sight of naked yogins, devotees of the god Shiva; holding tridents, their foreheads marked with red powder. The yogins were also pleased to see the Dalai Lama and offered him flower garlands. Though they were devotees of Shiva, to the Tibetans they looked like the fabled Mahasiddhas of the Buddhist tantric lineages. But when a yogin beckoned to the Dalai Lama to enter his hut, the Dalai Lama demurred. As his biographer put it, 'Suspecting defilement, he did not enter.' At Bodhgaya, the Dalai Lama meditated, restored the main statue of the Buddha, and performed a funerary ritual for an Englishman whose wife had recently died. He also took away from the site a small stone statue of the Buddha, and another of Ganesh. His biographer noted that the local guardian spirits did not show any signs of annoyance. Had the Archaeological Survey of India known, there might well have been some annoyance. But the ancient ways of the pilgrim and the modern scruples of the archaeologist are quite different.²²

Then, suddenly, everything changed. In October 1911, rocked by a series of mutinies, the tottering Manchu dynasty collapsed. The Chinese soldiers stationed in Lhasa immediately mutinied, attacking the amban. As the soldiers started looting the city, some Tibetans began to fight them. As soon as he heard what was happening, the Dalai Lama sprang into action. He sent one of his best young ministers secretly to Tibet to set up a war council and coordinate the uprising. Charles Bell passed on the British government's warning that the Dalai Lama should not encourage fighting in Tibet. To this,

the Dalai Lama responded, 'We must fight for the religion and our own freedom.'²³

Wanting to be closer to the action, the Dalai Lama moved back to Sikkim, where he could receive news and send orders to the newly established war council. He knew that it would not be an easy fight. Not all Tibetans wanted the Chinese out of Lhasa or the Dalai Lama back. The Tibetan government in Lhasa and the Panchen Lama had become friendly with the amban: the Panchen Lama had even moved into the Norbulingka for a while, and his monastery and followers had supported the Chinese presence. The Chinese were also supported by the monks of Drepung monastery and the smaller Tengyeling. On the other hand, the monks of Sera, renowned as the toughest fighters, were particularly keen to battle the Chinese troops.²⁴

The fighting was drawn out and bloody, with Lhasa divided into Tibetan and Chinese zones, both sides using brutal street warfare, digging tunnels and laying underground explosives in the enemy zone.²⁵ But the Chinese troops could only hold out so long without reinforcements. In the end they holed up in Tengyeling monastery for a few weeks before their food ran out. In early 1912, they were finally defeated. Soldiers were deported back to China via India, while the four ministers of the Kashag who had collaborated with the Chinese during the Dalai Lama's absence were executed. In June, the Dalai Lama returned to Tibet. It took a while for him to get back to Lhasa. He had to wait until the terms of surrender were agreed and the Chinese had finally left, but at last he walked through the gates of Lhasa again in January 1913. The wandering Dalai Lama had come home, with quite different ideas about Tibet's role in the world.

Just three weeks after his return to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama issued a proclamation that many saw as a declaration of Tibet's independence. But it began with a statement of his own authority to rule Tibet: 'Lord Buddha, from the glorious country of India, prophesied that the reincarnations of Avalokiteshvara, through successive rulers from the early religious kings to the present day, would look after the welfare of Tibet.' While appealing to an ancient tradition, the Dalai Lama was actually doing something rather new. It was, once again, Songtsen Gampo and the other imperial kings who provided the ideal of the divinely sanctioned Tibetan ruler, and the Dalai Lama was careful to remind the Tibetans of his place in this tradition. His proclamation also addressed Tibet's relationship with China: 'During the time of Genghis Khan and Altan Khan of the Mongols, the Ming dynasty of the Chinese, and

the Qing dynasty of the Manchus, Tibet and China co-operated on the basis of a patron and priest relationship. A few years ago the Chinese authorities in Sichuan and Yunnan endeavoured to colonise our territory.' The Dalai Lama saw this attempt at colonisation as a forfeiture of the patron–priest relationship: 'Meanwhile, the Manchu Empire collapsed. The Tibetans were encouraged to expel the Chinese from Central Tibet. I, too, returned safely to my rightful and sacred country, and I am now in the course of driving out the remnants of Chinese troops from Amdo and Kham in Eastern Tibet. Now, the Chinese intention of colonizing Tibet under the patron–priest relationship has faded like a rainbow in the sky.'²⁶

Over the past few years the Dalai Lama's attitude to China had changed fundamentally. Rather than seeing it as Tibet's protector, he now viewed it as an aggressor from which Tibet needed protection. And who would protect Tibet? Just as the Chinese attempts to colonise Tibet were motivated by the new idea of a nation state with firm borders, so the Dalai Lama's declaration of independence was also motivated by nationalism. The Chinese idea that Tibet was an inseparable part of China, and the opposing Tibetan idea that Tibet was an independent country, were both quite new. In the past there had simply not been a political vocabulary to talk about nations in this way. The Dalai Lama was learning fast, and he knew that an independent Tibet would need powerful friends.²⁷

DIPLOMACY

On a summer's day in 1913, in a cottage near Farnham in England, Basil J. Gould (known to almost everyone as 'B.J.') was poring over five letters written by the Dalai Lama to King George V, the queen, the secretary of state for India, the foreign secretary and the minister for education. The Tibetan letters were written in the traditional way, on large sheets of paper folded over and over into oblong parcels. The letter to the king was on especially fine speckled Tibetan paper, and when fully opened was the size of a large poster. It was also Gould's duty to identify and place a value on the many gifts that had been sent along with the letters.

Among the gifts were: 'One gold-gilt old image of CHEN-RE-DZI or the God of Love: the Dalai Lama is believed to be an incarnation of this God, £8-00'; 'One "Lodo" sword of Nya-rong (Eastern Tibet), £4-00'; 'One bundle of gold weighing 5 *srangs* (say), £22-00.' The most precious gift was over five hundred years old: 'One complete set of saddlery, which belonged formerly to

the King of Rimpung, £350-00.' The saddle told a story – of the victory of the Gelug school over its enemies, and of the right of the Dalai Lama's government to rule Tibet. The total value of the gifts added up to £1,600 (around £130,000 in today's money) and the Foreign Office agreed to spend even more on a set of return gifts. It would be Gould's duty to go shopping in London for appropriate presents for a Dalai Lama. In the end, nineteen gifts were sent, including photographs of the king and queen in gold frames and a pair of gold lions, arranged in a portable shrine, Tibetan style. Gould also bought a sword, a telescope, an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and a pair of guns.

But, as Gould wrote out his translations of the letters on that day, it became clear that the Dalai Lama was making a direct appeal for British protection. 'Your Great Empire,' he wrote, 'affords protection to the small kingdoms, so that the inhabitants live in peace. So therefore there has been, and will be, none other than Your Majesty who can afford protection to Tibet, and this protection we have resolutely determined to crave.' And the Dalai Lama had a concrete proposal for the king: 'We pray that, if it be possible, Your Majesty and the Emperor of Russia will consult together, and that you and he will each depute a representative to Lhasa, for the benefit of Tibet, and that the Power, both Temporal and Spiritual, may remain with the Tibetans themselves.' As for the Chinese, the Dalai Lama stuck to the old line: 'Be pleased to remember that Tibet is related to China as a Priest to his Disciple.'²⁸

A few days later Gould sent the complete, polished translation to the India Office. The other letters bore much the same message. Only the letter to the minister of education was different. The Dalai Lama's time in India had convinced him of the need to modernise Tibet. As an experiment, four Tibetan boys were sent to England to receive a modern British education. Gould himself escorted the boys, three of whom were sixteen, the other twelve, on the journey from Tibet to England. After Gould had taken them on a small tour of the country, they started at Rugby School – although the Dalai Lama's letter had asked for 'four first-class educations at Oxford College, London.'²⁹

As for King George, the only British monarch to have visited India, he was keen to receive the Tibetan gifts in person. The presents were handed over in Buckingham Palace by a young Tibetan official called Lungshar, one of the Dalai Lama's trusted inner circle who had accompanied the boys to England. According to Gould, 'The King and Queen were gracious and clearly interested.' But, for Lungshar, polite ceremonies were not enough. Since his arrival in London, he had become a thorn in the side of the India Office, setting

himself up in a flat in London and acting on his own initiative, arranging meetings with the king and high-ranking British officials. When these were obstructed, he told Gould that he was considering going to the USA, or Germany, or 'somewhere else'. And that somewhere else could only be Russia.

It was no empty threat – the Dalai Lama was still courting the tsar, sending letters in the same vein as those he had despatched to the British. He wrote to the Russian ruler that he 'would like to declare, for general knowledge, the proclamation of our independence, and about the election of ourself to be the supreme sovereign ruler of Tibet'. The next sentence showed that he still doubted the intentions of the British: 'England, however, opposes this, insisting on Chinese suzerainty.' Finally, he set out his real fear, the reason for continuing to appeal to the tsar for help: 'thus China may interfere with our affairs again and destroy our independence, which has been achieved finally after such blood-filled events.'³⁰

The noises emanating from the leaders of the new Chinese Republic were indeed troubling. The father of the revolution, Sun Yat-sen, had seen the fall of the Manchus as a victory for the ethnic Chinese or 'Han' over a foreign empire. The new Chinese Nationalists spoke of the union of the five races: Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, Muslim and Tibetan. But because their movement was an uprising of the Chinese against the Manchus, this new racial theory implicitly made the Chinese majority the rulers of China, with the minorities becoming the ruled. It was clear that, having overthrown the Manchus, the new rulers of China still wanted to maintain the vast extent of the Manchu empire. When the new president, Yuan Shikai, wrote the abdication speech for the outgoing child emperor, he declared that the Great Republic of China would be formed by the union of the 'five races together with their territory in its integrity'.³¹

In this spirit, the new Chinese president started making overtures to the Dalai Lama. But quite how little time the Dalai Lama had for China soon became obvious. Two friendly letters were sent in which the president reinstated the Dalai Lama by conferring the old Manchu titles on him, and gave him the news that the 'five races' were now 'one family'. The Dalai Lama, who had not asked for the Manchu titles back, did not accept them, and refused to reply to the president's letters. When the president tried to send a mission with the ostensible purpose of investing the Dalai Lama with these old titles, the British ambassador in Beijing objected and the idea had to be shelved.³²

So the Dalai Lama's intentions were clear enough, but it was also clear that the shaky idea of an independent Tibet would need to be placed on firmer

ground, which is why the Dalai Lama had asked in his letter to King George for British and Russian representatives to be stationed in Lhasa. If this could not be done, he asked for 'a discussion, to be held with other Kingdoms, in such a way that the Chinese may not harm the Tibetans, and that the Tibetans may enjoy their own power in Tibet'. The British government did not like the idea of a representative in Lhasa, but holding discussions – that they could do.

By the time the King's reply to the Dalai Lama was being carried back to Tibet by Lungshar, the plan for a peace conference was already well under way. King George wrote: 'Your Holiness is already aware that my government is adopting means to effect a settlement between your country and China, and to establish good relations between the British Empire, China and Tibet. I trust that the meeting between representatives which is to take place at Simla will be fruitful of good results and will bring peace to the people of Tibet.' So it seems that the British Foreign Office had decided that its preferred 'strictly non-committal attitude' was not quite going to cut it.

In fact, the British were disturbed by the nationalistic talk of the new Chinese Republic. A recent Chinese presidential order stated that 'the lands comprised within the confines of Mongolia, Tibet and Turkestan all become part of the Republic of China, and the races inhabiting these lands are equally citizens of the Republic of China'.³³ The president soon showed that he meant business, sending an army into Kham and authorising it to continue to Lhasa if possible.³⁴ This was most disturbing to the British, whose whole approach to Tibet was to keep it as a friendly buffer state between India and China. So it was not the ideal of Tibetan independence or the good of the Tibetan people that forced the British into action, but the British imperial presence in India. 'British interests', the viceroy wrote, 'would best be served by opposing inclusion of Tibet in China proper'.³⁵

And so the meeting at Simla came about. This was to be something new. Previously the British had signed agreements with the Chinese which were ignored by the Tibetans, while Younghusband's treaty with the Tibetans had been rejected by the Chinese. The only hope of a solution seemed to be to bring the Tibetans and the Chinese to the negotiating table together.³⁶ At the conference itself, there were heated debates as the Tibetans and the Chinese clashed over where the border between Tibet and China should be drawn. In the end, the British delegate got both sides to agree grudgingly on a border close to the old Manchu line. East of this would be known as 'Inner Tibet' and it would be loosely administered by China, as it had been under the Manchus.

The area to the west would be known as ‘Outer Tibet’, which would be self-governing and, to all intents and purposes, independent.

Once everybody had agreed to the boundaries of Inner and Outer Tibet, the Simla Agreement was drafted and signed by the delegates. The vital part was Article 2, which stated: ‘The government of Great Britain and China recognising that Tibet is under the suzerainty of China, and recognising also the autonomy of Outer Tibet, engage to recognise the territorial integrity of the country, and to abstain from interference in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama), which shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa.’³⁷ That tricky word ‘suzerainty’ was the key to the agreement. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a suzerain as ‘a sovereign or state having supremacy over another state which possesses its own ruler or government but cannot act as an independent power’.

The agreement thus suggested a special role in Outer Tibet for China, but one that stopped short of interfering in the running of the country. In other words, it followed the old Manchu idea that China was responsible for Tibet’s international affairs, but would have little influence in its internal affairs. Naturally, the president of China resented this definition of his country’s role in Tibet and refused to ratify the treaty that his delegate had signed. The British and the Tibetans, on the other hand, did ratify it, and considered it binding. Though the Dalai Lama was at first deeply disappointed by the division of Tibet into an Outer and an Inner territory, in the end he accepted that this solution at least allowed him the freedom to govern most of Tibet.

The importance of the Simla Agreement should not be underestimated. The line that demarcated Tibet’s border with China and India, known as the ‘McMahon Line’ after the British delegate at the conference, would later be the cause of a war between China and the newly independent India. The agreement convinced the Chinese that Britain would continue to meddle with Tibet unless they took full control there. Meanwhile, Britain persisted in describing China’s relationship to Tibet as ‘suzerainty’ long after the latter had been incorporated into Communist China – right up to 2008, in fact, when the foreign secretary announced that Britain, in line with most other nations, would abandon the language of the Simla Agreement and recognise Chinese *sovereignty* over Tibet.³⁸

A few months after Simla, Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, was assassinated, and Europe began to career towards the Great War. Tibet was a long way from the centre of things, and China,

chronically in debt and already carved up between foreign powers, had little opportunity to exercise its supposed suzerainty, even in the newly christened Inner Tibet. From now until the end of World War II, as the world's attention was turned away from Tibet, the Dalai Lama had the opportunity to remake his country. This involved him in a struggle with the forces of conservatism and inertia in Tibet that he could not ultimately win.

REFORMING TIBET

Friedrich Nietzsche's fictional prophet Zarathustra dismisses the value of freedom unless allied with a clear sense of purpose: 'Free *from* what? Zarathustra does not care about that! But your eyes should clearly tell me: free *for* what?'³⁹ The question could well be applied to Tibet at this time. The Dalai Lama's return in 1913 had created a fracture in Tibetan politics. All who had stayed and worked with the Chinese ambans while he was in exile – officials and abbots from Lhasa, as well as the Panchen Lama's court at Tashilhunpo – were now suspect. Then there was the great monastery at Drepung. Abbots from the monastery had worked closely with Chinese officials during the Dalai Lama's exile, and the monastery's monks had fought alongside the Chinese soldiers against Tibetans who were loyal to the Dalai Lama. In the years that followed the Dalai Lama's triumphant return, the monks of Drepung were the most suspicious of his rule. Many of them were from the east, where Tibetan monks sometimes preferred the light hand of Chinese rule to the increasingly heavy hand of Lhasa. The Dalai Lama was well aware of this simmering hostility when he revealed his plans to develop the Tibetan army.

There was no doubt in the mind of the Dalai Lama that Tibet needed an army of its own if Lhasa was to be spared another Chinese invasion. In the first years after he returned to Tibet there was constant fighting in Kham. Despite the Simla Agreement, the boundary between Tibet and China was by no means clear, and the situation was complicated by the fact that many Khampas had strong objections to being ruled from Lhasa and sometimes joined forces with the Chinese. The new Tibet envisaged by the Dalai Lama needed an army to protect its borders. While in exile he had seen the well-drilled soldiers of British India, and they seemed to him an ideal model for the new Tibetan army.

Consequently, after the Dalai Lama returned to Tibet, he asked the British to provide weapons, uniforms and instructors for the training of a modern

Tibetan army. The British had to tread carefully – under the Simla Agreement they were not meant to meddle in Tibet to this extent – but they wanted a strong Tibet as a buffer against China. So modern British rifles were bought and Tibetan officers trained in India. These officers were all Anglophiles who dressed in British khaki uniforms and drank tea with milk and sugar, rather than the traditional butter and salt. That in itself was enough to alienate Tibetan conservatives. The army threatened to tip the balance of power entirely, giving the Dalai Lama his own soldiers to counter the might of the fighting monks of the three major monasteries in Lhasa.

Added to that, building up the new army meant spending money, and the Tibetan government was broke. The Dalai Lama decided to squeeze the landowning aristocrats and monasteries with heavy new taxes. This came as a shock to the monasteries, which had traditionally been able to manage their own finances without interference. But the Dalai Lama had no intention of treating the monasteries with kid gloves. At the same time as drawing upon their wealth, he set out to reform the errant behaviour of the monks. All of the big monasteries were rife with corruption; academic titles could be bought for a price or given away to curry political favour. The Dalai Lama tried to put an end to such abuses. He also placed restrictions on monks' business activities to encourage them to spend time studying.

All of these tensions came to a head in 1921, when Charles Bell was in Lhasa as a representative of the British government, but also advising the Dalai Lama in an informal capacity as his friend.⁴⁰ For many, especially the monks, Bell was an unwelcome presence, and signs were put up around the city urging his assassination and that of the British doctor who had accompanied him. Bell also heard the arguments of the abbots that the Dalai Lama's army was against the Buddhist principles that were dear to Tibetans. Knowing full well where the opposition to his policies was strongest, the Dalai Lama made a preemptive strike, arresting three of the Drepung abbots. They were charged with unspecified crimes, punished by whipping and sent into exile. The monks of Drepung were electrified. Ignoring the pleas of their abbots, they poured out of the monastery in their thousands, heading straight for the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's residence. Nobody could stop this massive throng. The armed guards at the walls of the residence were unwilling to shoot, so the monks took their guns and broke them. Then the senior monks prostrated in the direction of the Dalai Lama's residence before shouting their protests. Some of the junior monks were less respectful, pulling up flowers,

smashing statues, and urinating and defecating in the Norbulingka's ornamental gardens.

Inside the residence, the Dalai Lama sat tight and waited for the storm to pass. By nightfall the monks were drifting back to their monastery. The next day, the Dalai Lama wasted no time in mobilising his new army. The seven hundred soldiers in Lhasa were given live ammunition while those in outlying districts were summoned back to the capital. The troops began to lay siege to Drepung, which appealed to the other two main monasteries for support. Sera, always the most loyal to the Dalai Lamas, refused outright, while Ganden wavered for a few days before siding with the Dalai Lama too. As Lhasa families began to hide their valuables, more and more soldiers arrived, until there were three thousand of them surrounding the monastery.

At Drepung the rebel monks knew the game was up. They held out for a few days, putting up signs bearing messages of protest above the monastery walls. The chief ringleader of the revolt slipped away, but was discovered hiding out in a cave in the nearby hills and brought back to Lhasa for punishment. So ended the revolution. Within a few days all was calm again and the new army paraded through Lhasa in full British-style regalia, before presenting arms in front of the Potala where the military band played 'God Save the King'. The Dalai Lama treated the monks leniently but took control of the appointment of Drepung's new abbots and banned Khampas from taking high positions at the monastery.⁴¹

Whatever the monks might think about it, Lhasa was changing. Soon there was a new British-trained police force on the streets, while one of the boys who had earlier been sent to study in England began to supervise the installation of electric street lights. In the course of performing the ancient religious duty of renovating temples, the Dalai Lama chose to install a modern mesh wire fence to protect the ancient Jokhang temple. (Again, some of the monks were appalled.) And among the aristocracy European clothes and cigarettes were becoming fashionable. A few years later the British telegraph operator Robert Ford would describe Lhasa as 'a sophisticated city where you could drink cocktails and dance the samba, play tennis and bridge and read newspapers only three weeks old'.⁴²

The Panchen Lama and his court at Tashilhunpo were not so easily dealt with as the turbulent monks of Drepung. In theory, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas act as each other's teachers in their successive lifetimes; in this life, the Panchen Lama was the younger of the two and the Dalai Lama should have

been his teacher. But this arrangement worked better in theory than in practice. Ever since the eighteenth century the Panchen Lamas had enjoyed a great deal of independence from Lhasa, and the Panchen Lama's court at Tashilhunpo ruled over vast tracts of Western Tibet. Now, with a strong-willed Dalai Lama back in Lhasa and determined to bring Tibet under his rule, the two men were bound to clash.

By all accounts the ninth Panchen Lama was a mild and humble man, reluctant to get entangled in politics, and with little talent for diplomacy. He was easily influenced by the people closest to him, whether they were British, Chinese or his own advisors at Tashilhunpo. When the Dalai Lama had fled Tibet after Younghusband's invasion, the Panchen Lama had been courted by the British and then by the Chinese. He had actually become the first Panchen Lama to travel to India, but on arrival there had found that the new viceroy had none of Curzon's ambitions for Tibet, and could offer him no assurances. He returned, chastened, to Tibet, only to find himself on the sharp end of the Manchu emperor's reprimands. Then, during the Dalai Lama's exile in India, the ambans had tried to install the Panchen Lama in Lhasa as a regent.

So when the Dalai Lama returned in 1913, the Panchen Lama was under a cloud of suspicion. The two lamas met, but could not resolve their differences. In a last bid to establish an independent relationship with Britain and China, the Panchen Lama tried, and failed, to send his own representative to the Simla conference. Over the next decade the tensions between the two lamas only increased, reaching the point of no return when the Dalai Lama insisted that Tashilhunpo pay a heavy tax to support the new Tibetan army. Not only were the Panchen Lama and his court unwilling to pay this money to Lhasa, they suspected that the new army might be used against them.

Rather than backing down, the Dalai Lama piled the pressure on. The result was a surprise for the Dalai Lama, and a disaster for his vision of an independent Tibet. In 1923, the Panchen Lama fled into the arms of China. Justifying his flight from Tibet in an official proclamation, he carefully avoided blaming the Dalai Lama, instead complaining of the intolerable pressure exerted by the Lhasa government. The Dalai Lama was not so diplomatic. He fired back a proclamation denouncing the Panchen Lama, likening him to a moth attracted to a flame and blaming him for not consulting directly with his teacher, the Dalai Lama. He even impugned the idea that this Panchen Lama was an emanation of a buddha, writing: 'It is difficult to believe that a person

who thinks of himself only and who is not freed of the three sins should be regarded as a Lama or Buddha.⁴³

In truth, the Dalai Lama was shaken by the Panchen Lama's decision, as were many others. Reports of evil omens and dark prophecies came from all over Tibet. The Dalai Lama had seriously mismanaged the Panchen Lama; though he later tried to bring about some kind of reconciliation, it was too late. The Panchen Lama had become an ally of the Chinese government or, as some saw it, a prisoner. Though he longed to return to Tashilhunpo, the Chinese insisted that he could only do so if he was escorted by Chinese soldiers, something the Dalai Lama would never accept. The stalemate has never really been broken since the Dalai Lama lost his most influential ally and one of Tibet's most revered leaders to China, and the rift has continued across two further incarnations of the Panchen Lama right down to the present day.⁴⁴

The flight of the Panchen Lama into the arms of China also brought home to the Dalai Lama that not everybody in Tibet shared his belief that independence from China was in the country's best interests. The monks and abbots in particular had no knowledge of twentieth-century politics, and therefore no understanding of why Tibet should become an independent nation state. Hadn't the old patron-priest relationship with China protected the religion, and brought the Gelug school to its position of primacy in Tibetan Buddhism? As a result, the monasteries tended to be more sympathetic to Chinese overtures than government officials, and some abbots pursued their own initiatives to form closer links with Chinese patrons.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF TIBET

In spite of all his reforms, the Dalai Lama was at heart a traditional Buddhist, and he felt it very much his duty to carry out the work of a Buddhist leader. He had a particular reverence for the great fourteenth-century scholar Buton, the compiler of the vast Tibetan Buddhist canon. Soon after returning from exile, he had printing blocks carved for an edition of Buton's writings. With that under his belt, he launched the much more ambitious project of printing the entire Buddhist canon. Since the only good blocks were those held at Derge in the east, this was something that Lhasa needed.

The grand project of having the blocks carved was a long, painful process, taking seven years, but the Dalai Lama's biographer considers it one of his greatest achievements. He also managed to fit regular meditation sessions into

his day, and a few years after his return from Lhasa entered the traditional three-year intensive meditation retreat. However, he was not willing to let go of the reins of the state even in retreat, and alternated between meditation sessions and meetings with his officials. Still, the teachings of the Buddha were his last refuge and comfort, as he expressed in the first verse of a religious poem written for a lama from Eastern Tibet:

I who have little intelligence,
 Have been hurt by many unpleasant events,
 Like illness, evil spirits and strong desires,
 But when I am steadfast, such events appear as friends;
 So I hope to have the strength to put into practice
 The instructions of my sublime teachers.⁴⁵

It would not be an exaggeration to say that almost everyone in Tibet, whether from the Panchen Lama's domains in the west, the Dalai Lama's in the centre or the independent-minded kingdoms in the east, held Buddhism close to their hearts. It defined, more than anything else, what it meant to be Tibetan. The fear of outsiders, and of change, that became so prevalent in Tibet came from a genuine wish to preserve Tibetan Buddhism. If the latter disappeared, what would be left of Tibetan culture?

Yet not everyone had the same vision of what Tibetan Buddhism ought to be. One of the most influential religious teachers of the early twentieth century in Tibet was a graduate from Sera monastery by the name of Dechen Nyingpo, better known by his honorary title Pabongka Rinpoche. He was an expert in tantric meditation who also wrote prolifically, in an age when innovation had become such an anathema that many great Gelug scholars never even learned to write. But, most of all, Pabongka was a great communicator. While most monks from Lhasa's monasteries spent little time with laypeople except for the purposes of business or politics, Pabongka went out and preached to them. Short and rotund, he had a carrying voice that boomed out over large crowds. He became famous for his clear and charismatic presentations of the graduated path that had been set out by the Gelug school's founder, Tsongkhapa.

For Pabongka, the path to enlightenment that Tsongkhapa had explained in his great works was far superior to the approaches of the other Tibetan schools. Most importantly, the other schools had all gone astray in their understanding of emptiness, the fundamental philosophical concept of Tibetan Buddhism.

After the Dalai Lama's death in 1933 Pabongka decided to leave Central Tibet and head eastwards to preach in Kham. Here his own school was in the minority, and he became a kind of missionary, trying to persuade Nyingma monasteries to convert to the Gelug school and rousing Gelug monks with his sermons. The latter proved hugely successful, and there were reports of monks pulling down statues of Padmasambhava and throwing Nyingma books into rivers.⁴⁶

Then, in 1935, Pabongka struck up a relationship with a Chinese warlord who had made his fortune controlling the opium trade. Liu Wenhui had invaded Kham in the early 1930s, and, by breaking a truce with Lhasa, had pushed his own territory all the way to the Yangtse river.⁴⁷ This part of Kham was now known as the Chinese province of Xikang and, when he first met Pabongka, Liu was fighting against a self-rule movement called 'Kham for Khampas' led by a popular Nyingma lama. What did Pabongka want from the warlord? It seems that, unlike the Dalai Lama, but like many other Tibetan monks, he was still basing his activities on the old patron–priest model. He hoped that this Chinese warlord would be a patron for the Gelug school, finally ensuring its success in Kham. The idea of a Tibetan nation state with clearly defined borders was of little interest to him.

In his sermons to the warlord – and also to the warlord's wife, who had been particularly impressed by the charismatic monk – Pabongka explained the supremacy of the Gelug philosophical approach and the shortcomings of the other schools. 'So it happens', he wrote, 'that some have fallen into the philosophical view of nihilism, which is a cause of going to hell. Everything apart from the school of Tsongkhapa represents a mistaken philosophical view.' But he also made an appeal to the worldly ambitions of the warlord, along with a direct plea for support for the Gelug school: 'Yet even though this essence of the teachings is the sole path to enlightenment, there are many in Tibet who are deeply attached to false schools. Each one of these is marked by evil fortune. In your territory, if you were to establish anew the essence of the Buddha's teachings, the teaching of Tsongkhapa, then your own good luck would be such that hundreds of millions of gods like Brahma and Indra could not compete with it!'⁴⁸

In the end, Pabongka's hopes would come to nothing. Liu, ever the political opportunist, switched sides to the Communists when they swept into Kham. But Pabongka's pursuit of patronage for his own school and denigration of other schools left a marked impression in Kham. His activities did nothing to allay local suspicions of the Gelug school – and, by extension, of the Tibetan

government – among the Khampas. This division would make it much easier for the Chinese Communists to enter Tibet once they discovered that many Khampas felt no loyalty to the Tibetan government and had few qualms about joining the Chinese to fight against it.

LAST YEARS

By the 1930s, the Dalai Lama was beginning to feel his age. He was thinking about giving up his secular powers, and even his religious authority, in order to concentrate on meditation. But however often he talked about doing this, he never felt confident enough of his government to let go of the running of Tibet. By this time many of his early reforms had faltered. In deference to the wishes of the monks, the powers of army officers had been curtailed and the army itself had been kept to a small size. Moreover, his cherished project to bring modern education to Tibet had been scuppered by the monasteries. In 1924, the Dalai Lama had extended his experiment of sending Tibetan boys to English schools by setting up a modern school based on British methods at Gyantse. But the abbots were anxious that the school might undercut the traditional role of the monasteries as the educators of the young, for outside them there was no formal education in Tibet. The modern school was thus closed despite achieving impressive results.

In his later years the Dalai Lama spent most of his time in his pleasant residence, the Norbulingka – he always disliked the massive Potala Palace, better to look at from the outside than to live within. With a pronounced stoop, supported by a walking stick, he pottered among his ornamental gardens, planting the seeds of English flowers that Charles Bell sent him in the post. Though the Dalai Lama continued to have great respect for Bell, he had lost faith in the British when it became clear how little they were really willing to offer Tibet. Still, he allowed British missions to continue to visit Lhasa from time to time. In 1924, the first European woman to visit Lhasa – the wife of the new British political officer – had an audience with the Dalai Lama in the Norbulingka. Wanting to give some idea of what modern European women were achieving, she told him of the record-breaking flight from England to Australia by Amy Johnson. The Dalai Lama was quiet for a moment, then asked why she had been in such a hurry.⁴⁹

Lack of haste may have been a dearly held principle of Tibetan life, but there was no stopping the speed of change as the twentieth century unfolded. The

Dalai Lama had watched apprehensively as Russia was taken over by the Bolsheviks and turned more and more against religion. The monastery established in St Petersburg by his great friend Dorjiev was destroyed (as for Dorjiev himself, though he outlived the Dalai Lama, he was arrested by the KGB and died in a Soviet prison in 1938). Stalin's new regime had swept through Mongolia, with disastrous results for the monks and monasteries. The Dalai Lama feared the consequences of a Communist invasion of Tibet well before most Tibetans had any notion of such a thing being possible. In what came to be considered his last testament, he gave a dire warning against the Communist threat: 'Nowadays the manifestations of the five kinds of degeneration are manifest everywhere. Worst of all is the Red ideology, which is becoming more and more rampant. It has caused the search for the rebirth of the Jetsun Dampa to be banned, the property of the monasteries to be looted, and the monks to be forced into the army. Buddhism has been destroyed so completely that not even the name remains.' This was the situation in Mongolia. If Communism came to Tibet, he warned, the results would be even worse. The union of religion and government, going back to the time of the Buddhist tsenpos of the Tibetan empire, the 'dharma kings', would be destroyed:

If we are not able to protect our own country, then everyone who supports the Buddha's teachings, whether they be commoners or nobility, and the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama in particular, will be wiped out so completely that not even their names will remain. The estates and property of the monasteries and monks will be annihilated. The tradition of government exemplified by the three ancestral dharma kings will degenerate into mere words. The low will be made high, so that everywhere serfs will steal the ancestral estates, wealth and property, and we will be forced to wander the land as the servants of our enemies. Everyone will be subjected to torture, and both day and night will be an unending round of fear and suffering. Such a time as this will come for sure! ⁵⁰

Though his warnings were prescient, the thirteenth Dalai Lama would not live to see them fulfilled. It is sometimes said that he died early (he was only fifty-seven) so that his successor would be old enough to lead Tibet when the trouble came. His relatively short life had been incredibly eventful, and he had prevailed against incredible odds, including the machinations of Lhasa

politicians who wanted him to remain a figurehead, invasions by Britain and China, and years of exile. In the end, he had become more powerful than even the Great Fifth, who had relied on a Mongol patron styling himself 'king of Tibet.' Of all the Dalai Lamas, only the thirteenth actually realised the ideal of a single ruler embodying the union of secular and religious authority.

Still, some might say that the thirteenth failed in his aim of making Tibet a viable independent country. The border with China was still unresolved, and in his final years he had watched helpless as the warlord Liu Wenhui had pushed that border back in the direction of Lhasa again. It was clear enough that the Tibetan army was still incapable of victory against a powerful enemy. Thus far China had been too weak to take advantage of this fact, but things were changing fast. Soon after the death of the Dalai Lama, a mission from the Chinese Nationalist government arrived in Lhasa, offering condolences and trying to regain some kind of influence. The Tibetans continued to insist that the Chinese must not interfere in their internal affairs but allowed a Chinese mission to be established in Lhasa. A few years later they also allowed the British to station a full-time representative there.

Tibet's internal affairs were badly affected by the lack of a strong leader in the years between the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama and the accession of the fourteenth. Lhasa politics returned to the bad old ways of the nineteenth century, with different factions constantly intriguing against each other. This short interregnum saw a war between two regents, sex scandals and murder. Another plan to set up a modern school was quashed by the monasteries, this time with threats to send fighting monks to kidnap the young students.

Anyone brave enough to propose significant reforms had the cautionary fate of Lungshar to consider. It was Lungshar who had accompanied the four Tibetan schoolboys to Britain in 1913, and though the experience made him fairly suspicious of the British, he had a much better understanding of international politics than almost anyone else in the Lhasa government. Shortly after the Dalai Lama's death, in 1934, Lungshar was about to present his proposals for fairly modest reforms to the Kashag (mainly to change ministers' lifetime tenures to four-year terms), when he was falsely accused of an assassination plot and arrested. After his trial he received the traditional Tibetan punishment of having his eyes pulled from their sockets. Since the Dalai Lama had discouraged some of the most brutal traditional punishments, the jailers had

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to rely on the oral accounts of their parents. Yaks' knucklebones were placed on Lungshar's temples, and a leather cord was bound around his head. As the latter was tightened, the eyeballs were supposed to pop out, but the operation was botched and one eyeball had to be prised out with a knife. News of this brutal punishment worked effectively to deter other Tibetan reformers, who began to emigrate to India and China. So it was that Tibet met the People's Liberation Army essentially unchanged, politically divided and quite unprepared.⁵¹



Under the Red Flag, 1950–1959

INVASION

As he rode into town in 1950, the new Tibetan government representative in Kham was greeted with the traditional ceremony, if little genuine enthusiasm. Ngapo Ngawang Jigme was tall, pale and, according to the ladies of Lhasa, very handsome. Some found him arrogant and aloof, though friends said he was just shy. He wore the silk robes and hat of his office, as well as the single pendulous earring and long braided hair that marked him as a member of the aristocratic government elite. Indeed, little had changed in the appearance of a Tibetan minister since the time of the Tibetan empire over a thousand years before. In a small concession to the twentieth century, Ngapo also wore a pair of small round sunglasses to protect his eyes against the high-altitude glare, similar to the type John Lennon would popularise twenty years later. Nobody, least of all Ngapo himself, knew how important he would become in determining Tibet's future.¹

The headquarters of the Lhasa government in Kham was in the town of Chamdo, close to the border that had been established after the Tibetan army's battles with the warlord Liu Wenhui. The local Khampas were not particularly keen on the Lhasa officials, who usually abused their position by making a fortune through taxing the peasants and accepting bribes. Even the Central Tibetans had their doubts about Ngapo. At forty years old, he had already enjoyed a brilliant career but his aristocratic credentials were poor. He was in fact the illegitimate child of a nun, and had been adopted by the head of the

Ngapo family, who had no other heir. When his adoptive father had died, he had married the widow, his young stepmother. This was not an unusual practice in Tibet, but there were still snobbish whisperings about Ngapo's parentage.

Though Ngapo had served in Kham before, he was not happy at being sent back just now. His adoptive father had died defending Chamdo against Liu Wenhui, and it looked as though another Chinese invasion was looming. The long civil war in China had ended with the victory of Mao Zedong's Communists, and it soon became clear that Mao's vision for China had something in common with that of his old enemies, the Nationalists. He wanted to unite the 'five races' into a single motherland or, as he preferred to call it, the Big Family. It was an incredibly ambitious plan, taking the farthest reaches the old Manchu empire and transforming them into a very modern kind of nation.

If any army could accomplish this feat, it was the well-disciplined, highly ideological People's Liberation Army. As early as September 1949, a Peking Radio broadcast had stated that Tibet was an indivisible part of China, and anyone who failed to recognise this would 'crack his skull against the mailed fist of the PLA'.² In January 1950, Mao, sitting with Joseph Stalin in Moscow, casually mentioned his plan to conquer Tibet. Stalin agreed, saying, 'It's good that you are preparing to attack. The Tibetans need to be subdued.' He assured Mao that he would consider giving military assistance to the project.³

On his journey from Lhasa, Ngapo had told anyone who cared to listen that Tibet had no hope of fighting off the Chinese. He was by nature a diplomat rather than a general, but his assessment of Tibet's chances was realistic. It is not that Tibet was a nation of pacifists, as it has sometimes been pictured. Far from it, in fact. The Khampas, who always carried a sword or gun, were ruthless killers when engaging in banditry, family feuds or territorial battles; and when they won a battle they took no prisoners. They were fierce opponents, but quite as capable of fighting for the Chinese as against them. As for the Tibetan army in Kham, it comprised only about 3,500 poorly disciplined soldiers, many of whom were in their fifties and sixties. Facing them was a battle-hardened unit, 20,000 strong, of the People's Liberation Army.⁴

The Tibetan army would have been bigger and better but for resistance from the Lhasa monastic community, which feared the creation of a military that would threaten its own power and independence. Indeed, just a few years earlier, in 1947, Ngapo and his fellow ministers had called on the army to fight the monks of Sera monastery. This was the culmination of the power struggles

that followed the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and it almost turned into a civil war between the monastery and the government, ending with the shelling of Sera monastery and the murder of the previous regent, the abbot of Reting, who was accused of fomenting the rebellion.⁵

All this internal wrangling had hampered any concerted effort at international relations. When Mao declared victory for the Communist Party in October 1949, the Tibetan government recognised the seriousness of the situation and sent letters seeking international support against a Communist invasion. The replies that came back to Lhasa were extremely discouraging. The Tibetans' first hope centred on their old allies, the British. But after withdrawing from India, the British wanted no further entanglement with Tibet; they merely suggested that Britain's old interests in Tibet were now a matter for the newly independent Indian government. For their part, the Indians were keen to forge a close relationship with China. When overtures to the Americans were also rebuffed, the Tibetans realised that they were to face China alone.

So when Ngapo arrived in Chamdo in 1950, he was in a pessimistic mood. Still, he had his orders, and reinforcements were arriving from Lhasa. Tibet would fight. One of the first people Ngapo received in his new residence was the Englishman Robert Ford. A significant step in the recent frantic efforts to modernise and rearm Tibet against China was the purchase of wireless radio equipment so that Lhasa could communicate with its frontier towns. Attempts to train Tibetans to operate the radios had failed, due to the lack of a modern education system in Tibet, and eventually Ford – then on a temporary posting to the British mission in Lhasa – had applied for the job of radio operator. He was accepted, and became the first European to be employed as a Tibetan government official.

Now stationed in Lhasa, Ford, or 'Phodo' as he was known to his Tibetan colleagues, transmitted daily reports back to Lhasa, and listened to the broadcasts from Radio Peking. That was how the Tibetans first heard of the Communists' avowed plans to 'liberate' Tibet. On New Year's Day 1950, Radio Peking had announced that the tasks for the People's Liberation Army that year were to liberate Taiwan, Hainan and Tibet from British and American imperialists. In fact, there were no Americans in Tibet at that time and Ford was the only Briton apart from the British trade agent in Lhasa, Hugh Richardson, who was due to leave in August, to be replaced by a representative of the newly independent India. Also in Lhasa were two Austrian refugees,

Peter Aufschnaiter and Heinrich Harrer, who would later write the bestseller *Seven Years in Tibet*.⁶

Despite this paucity of foreigners in Tibet, the Communists were sincere in their belief that Tibet's uncompromisingly independent attitude to China was the result of foreign intervention. The Tibetan government's decision to expel the Chinese representative, along with all the other Chinese from Lhasa in 1949, had only confirmed them in this belief.⁷

It was not only Communist ideology that led Mao to make the 'liberation' of Tibet one of his priorities. There was also national pride. China had suffered one humiliation after another during the previous century, at the hands of the British, the Japanese and other foreign powers. The thirteenth Dalai Lama's rejection of China in 1913 had been yet another slap in the face for Chinese pride. If China was to stand up for itself again, it was vital to begin by reasserting control over Tibet. Then there was the more practical issue of national borders. In the modern world, the old fluid line separating China and Tibet that had shifted back and forth across Kham was not an option. If Tibet remained independent, China's southwestern border would continue to be along the Yangtse river, a difficult terrain to defend. But if China could annex Tibet completely, it would be along the Himalayan range that had kept Tibet secure in its isolation for centuries.⁸

There was some hope that fighting could be avoided completely. Mao knew that taking Tibet by military force would not help his claim that he was only doing what was best for the Tibetans. He therefore wanted to negotiate a peaceful settlement. So did the Tibetans, though they had a very different idea of what that settlement might be. When Ngapo arrived in Chamdo, he knew that another Tibetan minister had been sent to India to negotiate with the Communists. But everything seemed to conspire against these negotiations. The Chinese wanted them to happen in Beijing, while the Tibetans wanted to hold them in a neutral territory such as Hong Kong. A brief meeting between the Tibetan representative and the Chinese ambassador in Delhi resulted in a stalemate. The ambassador put the Chinese position: 'Tibet must be regarded as part of China.' When this was wired to the Kashag in Lhasa, the return telegram gave a simple response: 'No.' In the face of imminent disaster, the Kashag dug in its heels.

Other approaches were attempted from the Chinese side. Those Tibetans who had sided with the Communists were used to persuade others to give up their independent status. Getag Tulku, a Tibetan lama who had converted to

the Communist cause, came to Chamdo and repeated the ambassador's words: 'Tibet must be regarded as part of China.' This time the Kashag simply ignored the ultimatum, and while he waited in Chamdo, Getag died, allegedly poisoned. Then, in May 1950, Geshe Sherab Gyatso, a former abbot of Sera monastery, now deputy chairman of the Qinghai provincial government, broadcast an appeal to the Tibetans to agree to become part of China. There was also an implicit threat in his message: if they did not want Tibet to join China, the PLA would do it for them.

By the time Ngapo arrived in Kham, the PLA was in position at the edge of political Tibet. To the immense frustration of Robert Ford, the extra radio set Ngapo had brought with him was not to be sent to the border, but kept as a back-up in Chamdo: Ngapo wanted to be sure he could stay in communication with Lhasa. Another spare set was taken away by the representative whom Ngapo was replacing, so that he too could remain in contact with Lhasa on his journey back. So it was that when the PLA began its advance into Tibet on 7 October, it was five days before the news reached Chamdo.

Hearing of the Chinese army's advance, Ngapo immediately had Ford radio a message to Lhasa. There was no immediate response. The next day, and the next, the message was sent again, and still no response came from Lhasa. On 15 October, Ngapo's aide sent an urgent message asking why there had been no response, and emphasising that time was of the essence. He was astounded by the reply: it was the Kashag's annual picnic, a pleasant ritual that lasted several days. When the picnic was over, the members would respond. The response from Chamdo was incredulous: 'Shit on their picnic! Though we are blocked here, and the nation is threatened, and every minute may make a difference to our fate, you talk about that shitty picnic!'⁹

The very next day news came that the PLA was about to march on Chamdo. Ngapo radioed Lhasa, asking whether to surrender or flee the Chinese. This time a response came immediately: flee. That night a messenger brought more news: the PLA had reached another strategic town, Riwoche, and might block the route to Lhasa. Ngapo and his officials hurriedly packed and fled before dawn. Ford, who woke up to find that he had been left behind, witnessed the anger of the local Khampas, who were looting the town and looking for Tibetan officials to vent their anger upon. As he prepared to flee, Ford noticed that the Tibetan officials and soldiers feared the Khampas more than the PLA.

Later that afternoon Ford caught up with the Tibetan officials. Ngapo had changed out of his silk robes into the plain clothes of a junior official and

looked frightened and miserable. They rode on through the night together, climbing a perilously high pass in complete darkness, only to hear on descending the other side that the road to Lhasa had been cut off by soldiers. Learning that these were Khampas fighting for the Communists, Ngapo led his party to the nearest monastery, where he hoped the Khampas would refrain from shedding blood. There, the officials were joined by a retreating battalion of Tibetan soldiers. Their commander was confident that they could fight their way through to the Lhasa road. But when he went into the monastery to talk to Ngapo, he was told in no uncertain terms that there was no longer any option but to surrender. By then the PLA had arrived, and the monastery was surrounded.

NEGOTIATING

A few weeks later Ngapo was back in his residence in Chamdo. He ate in the officers' mess with the top Chinese officials and was not treated like a prisoner. But the town itself was quite changed. Chinese soldiers patrolled the streets, and posters had been plastered over the walls. These assured the Tibetans that the PLA was there to help free them from imperialist oppression, that no harm would come to the lamas or the temples, and that no changes would be made to Tibet's government or military. The Tibetans were also informed that the PLA would act with the utmost sensitivity towards them, being polite and fair and paying good prices for anything it needed. It was all part of Mao's plan to win over Tibet gradually. The PLA's soldiers – who were from the army's Southwest Bureau and were led by a veteran of the Communists' Long March – had been well briefed and behaved with exceptional decency.

The situation was different for Robert Ford. As a living, breathing imperialist, he was imprisoned and subjected to repeated interrogations, with the aim of getting him to confess to spreading imperialist propaganda. He was also accused of poisoning the Communist lama Getag Tulku. It was five years before Ford was released from prison. After returning to England, he wrote about the interrogations and 're-education' sessions in the book *Captured in Tibet*, providing an early report of the sharp edge of Chinese Communist persuasion.¹⁰

But for the Tibetans, for now, the approach was to be softly, softly. One of the leading Tibetan Communists was a tall, handsome and idealistic Khampa called Puntsog Wangyal (though generally known as Punwang). He was given

the task of talking to Ngapo about the Communist Party's policies, and at the same time advising him that there was no point in Tibet opposing China. 'Whether the rock hits the egg or the egg hits the rock,' he said, quoting an old Chinese saying, 'the result is the same.' Ngapo hardly needed convincing. He wrote a letter to the Kashag, telling its members how well the Communists were behaving and suggesting that peaceful 'liberation' was preferable to the sufferings of war. He also suggested that the Tibetan officials should go to Beijing to negotiate with the Communists. Since he was unsure who was now in charge, he addressed the letter to 'whoever holds political authority in Lhasa.'

In fact, things had changed in Lhasa. Realising the desperate situation Tibet was in and the need for firm leadership, the Kashag had persuaded the fourteenth Dalai Lama to take the reins of power. Tenzin Gyatso was only sixteen and would normally have had another two years' grace before accepting this heavy responsibility. He was not convinced that the Communists were as benign as Ngapo thought. His eldest brother, Thubten Jigme Norbu, or Taktser Rinpoche, had recently arrived in Lhasa, having given up his post as abbot of the great Kumbum monastery in Amdo, where Communist policies were already being implemented in full. Norbu had already been subjected to Communist 're-education' and had only been allowed to travel to Lhasa because he had promised to persuade the Dalai Lama to accept the forthcoming liberation. Having made his escape, Norbu wanted nothing more to do with the Communists. Within weeks, he was in New York.¹¹

Still feeling that negotiating with China should be a last resort, the Tibetan government made a heartfelt plea to the UN, only to be rejected by the British and Indian governments. The timing was unfortunate for Tibet, since the world's attention was focused on the Korean War. There was more interest in the Tibetan problem in the United States, alert to the spread of Communism anywhere in the world and determined to resist it. But the Tibetans knew nothing of this. All they knew was that the UN would do nothing for them. Meanwhile, Ngapo's messengers rode hard to reach Lhasa as quickly as they could. At one point they had to walk. It was traditional for travellers holding an official passport simply to take the horses and food that they needed from the villages en route, a cause of much resentment among ordinary people who could do nothing about it. But now people were telling Ngapo's messengers that they had been liberated and were refusing to hand over the horses. It looked like change was coming faster than anyone expected.

When the messengers arrived in Lhasa there was much debate about Ngapo's letter, with some ministers wanting to continue the fight, but in the end the majority argued for peaceful negotiations. They decided that Ngapo would head a team of negotiators who should travel straight away to Beijing. As soon as they had despatched the negotiators to join Ngapo, the Kashag and the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa for a safe refuge in the town of Yadong, on the border with Sikkim. This led to the strange situation of the leaders of Tibet being holed up in a remote town, having granted authority for Tibet's future to be decided far away in Beijing. At the same time, vast mule trains were leaving Lhasa laden with the gold and treasures of the Lhasa nobility, for safekeeping in Sikkim.

On the way to Beijing, Ngapo cut off his long hair. It was a symbolic gesture, indicating how quickly he was moving from Tibet's traditional past into a new future. There would be no turning back. His instructions from Lhasa stated that he must make a claim for Tibet's independence and argue that historically the relationship between Tibet and China had been that of priest and patron. But the Kashag understood the weakness of its position. If it came to a deadlock, Ngapo was authorised to accept Tibet as a part of China, in name only, as long as Tibet could keep its internal independence and no Chinese soldiers were stationed in Tibet. Still Ngapo was sceptical. On reading one last condition, that any Chinese representative in Tibet must be a Buddhist, he laughed and scornfully asked his colleagues, 'Whoever heard of a Communist Buddhist?'

As it turned out, there was less room for negotiation than even Ngapo expected. When he opened the talks with the statement that Tibet had always been an independent country and its relationship to China was one of priest and patron, the Chinese lead negotiator informed him that the status of Tibet was not even on the agenda. It was a fact of history that Tibet had always been a part of China – that was that. The Chinese put their points for negotiation on the table, and the discussions were to be about these only. Always hanging in the air was the threat that the PLA would continue the invasion to Lhasa itself. When one of the Tibetans pressed the Chinese negotiator too far, he became angry and made the threat explicit: 'Are you showing your clenched fist to the Communist Party? If you disagree then you can leave, whenever you like. It is up to you to choose whether Tibet would be liberated peacefully or by force. It is only a matter of sending a telegram to PLA group to recommence their march into Tibet.'¹²

Translating and mediating between the two sides was Punwang, the Tibetan Communist cadre, who managed to smooth over some of the disputes. In the end, the Tibetans agreed to all of the seventeen points. The first two represented the biggest concessions. The first stated that the Tibetans would ‘return to the big family of the Motherland – the People’s Republic of China’. This effectively ended Tibet’s *de facto* independence. The second stated that ‘the local government of Tibet shall actively assist the People’s Liberation Army to enter Tibet and consolidate the national defence’. This would allow the PLA to walk into Lhasa unopposed. Most of the other points were concessions to the Tibetans, stating that there would be no change to the authority of the Dalai Lama and his government; that there would be religious freedom; and that any reforms would be gradual. There was also a secret supplement laying out the size of the PLA army to be stationed in Tibet, and another stating that if the Dalai Lama fled into exile he could return within a year to his former position of authority. Reassuringly for the Tibetans, there was not a single mention in the agreement of Communism or the role of the Communist Party.¹³

Ultimately Ngapo felt that he had done the best he could. If the Kashag did not like the agreement, it could always refuse to ratify it. To give it the chance to do this, he didn’t tell the Chinese that he had his seal of office, the seal of a member of the Kashag, with him. Instead, the Chinese made new seals for each of the Tibetans, with which they stamped the document on 23 May 1951.¹⁴ A celebratory banquet was thrown, attended by Mao himself. Since none of the Tibetans had thought to insist that the agreement be kept secret until it could be discussed by the Kashag, a few days later Ngapo was put on Radio Peking, stating that he had signed the ‘Seventeen-Point Agreement’, and that Tibet had agreed to peaceful liberation, becoming part of the People’s Republic of China.

SURRENDER

This radio broadcast was the first that the Tibetan government heard of the agreement. Ngapo had not kept in daily contact with the Kashag during the negotiations, having become frustrated with its unrealistic negotiating stance and the long delays between replies. Now its members were shocked at how much had been given away. For the Chinese, it was a stunning propaganda victory. They could claim justification for their statements that Tibet was an integral part of China. International observers were surprised that Tibet had

given up its independence, but most assumed that the agreement had been made with the full consent of the Tibetan government.

Except for the Americans, that is. The Tibetan officials who had been sent to India were still there, and deep in talks with the US Embassy; at the same time, the Dalai Lama's brother Thubten Norbu was talking to State Department officials in New York. Spurred on by its determination to resist the spread of Communism anywhere in the world, the United States made a sustained attempt to influence the Dalai Lama. It wanted him to go into exile and repudiate the Seventeen-Point Agreement. This, it felt, would be the best basis for fighting the Communists in Tibet. It even promised asylum in the United States and military aid for resisting the Chinese, though it refused to put these promises in an official, signed document. Meanwhile, the British advised the Kashag that it was free to repudiate the Seventeen-Point Agreement if it could show that duress had been applied to the delegates or if they had exceeded their instructions.

What the British and Americans failed to appreciate was that the majority of the Tibetan government actually wanted to accept the agreement. Most powerful among this faction were abbots from Lhasa's three major monasteries, including the Dalai Lama's own tutor. The abbots had long memories of Tibet's history. They knew that when great powers had risen on Tibet's borders in the past, the Buddhist leaders had usually come to an arrangement with it. Pagpa had come to an arrangement with Kubilai Khan, the fifth Dalai Lama had come to an arrangement with Gushi Khan, and Pholhane had come to an arrangement with the Qianlong Emperor. In each case these foreign leaders had left Tibetans to run the country and allowed the monasteries to thrive. Why then should Mao be any different?

On 7 July 1951, all of the high lamas and officials gathered for a heated and acrimonious meeting in the frontier town of Yadong to decide whether to repudiate or accept the Seventeen-Point Agreement. Some were adamantly against, and it was known that the Dalai Lama did not like it. However, the most senior and eloquent opponents of China were abroad trying to raise foreign support. So, after three days of debate, the decision went with the majority and it was agreed that the Dalai Lama should return to Lhasa and accept the treaty once he had consulted the National Assembly.

Thus Tibet's independence, which the thirteenth Dalai Lama had fought for, was given up. Though it might seem strange that it was done so easily, it should be remembered that the Tibetans felt very much alone, disappointed and deeply

discouraged by the lack of support from the rest of the world. Britain, the ally that the thirteenth Dalai Lama had relied upon to counterbalance the power of China, had abandoned its role in Tibet when it left India, and the newly independent India had little interest in helping Tibet if it meant angering China. America's covert and ambiguous offers were hard to quantify. As for fighting the Chinese directly, Tibetan morale had collapsed after the fall of Chamdo and nobody seriously contemplated further resistance to the PLA. Everyone thought that the Chinese could now march into Lhasa as soon as they chose.

Indeed, the first representatives of the PLA were on their way. The Tibetan negotiators were returning to Tibet via India, along with a high-ranking Chinese general. A few days after the meeting, the general arrived in Yadong and went straight to meet the Dalai Lama on the roof terrace of the monastery where he was staying. The Dalai Lama watched the Chinese approach from a window, and was surprised at how drab and insignificant they looked in their plain grey uniforms and peaked caps. Over tea, the Dalai Lama told the general that he would be returning to Lhasa, and that the Seventeen-Point Agreement would be accepted after a meeting of the whole National Assembly in Lhasa.¹⁵

Now everyone was waiting for Ngapo, who was riding back to Lhasa via the long overland route, carrying the original signed copy of the agreement. The Chinese had not allowed him to fly to India, fearing that he might defect. He finally arrived back in Lhasa in September, and at the end of that month over three hundred officials met to make the final decision. Though members of the Kashag did not normally attend meetings of the National Assembly, Ngapo asked to be allowed to explain his reasons for signing the agreement. For over an hour he spoke with passion, defending himself against accusations that he had sold out to China and arguing that the agreement was the best way forward in the current circumstances.

In the end, Ngapo said, the National Assembly had to decide whether the Seventeen-Point Agreement was best for Tibet. If members thought he had done wrong, then they should decide on an appropriate punishment for him and the other negotiators: 'Whatever you want to take, our body, life, property, whatever you have to do, go ahead and do it and we will have no regrets.'¹⁶ In a personal audience with the Dalai Lama, Ngapo talked even more frankly about the pressure he had been under in Beijing, and the hardships he had endured, the worst of which was being accused by Tibetan colleagues of being a Chinese stooge. He told the Dalai Lama that he had hidden his official seal

and that it was still possible to repudiate the agreement. As he talked to the Dalai Lama about his feelings, Ngapo burst into tears.¹⁷

A month later the Dalai Lama sent a telegram to Mao, accepting the agreement 'relating to the measures for the peaceful liberation of Tibet'.¹⁸ Over the next few months two more PLA generals and thousands of Chinese troops arrived in Lhasa, setting up great tented military encampments on the outskirts of the city, and occasionally parading through the streets carrying portraits of Mao and other Party luminaries and banners urging the Tibetans to unite with the Motherland. By the end of the year there were eight thousand Chinese soldiers in Lhasa, doubling the city's population. Thousands more were sent south to secure China's new border with India.

Where the Manchus and the Nationalists had failed, the Communists had finally succeeded. After Younghusband's invasion, the Manchus had attempted to extend China's national border to the Himalayas, but this project had been interrupted by the fall of their empire and the fracturing of China. And while the Nationalists and the warlord Liu Wenhui had done what they could to claim Kham for their own, Central Tibet had remained beyond their grasp. Now the Communists had done it, getting the Dalai Lama to agree that Tibet was a part of China. Though the PLA had met fierce resistance at Chamdo, it could now march into Lhasa without firing a further shot. It was also the beginning of a new era, in which the Communist Party would have to work out how to incorporate Tibet into its new China, and the Tibetans would have to find a way to exist in this new world.

APPEASEMENT

The Chinese Communists called their Tibetan citizens – along with other non-Chinese peoples who had been part of the old Manchu empire – a 'national minority'. Mao was impressed by the success of Lenin and Stalin in incorporating the minority states of the old Russian empire into the new Soviet Union. So, just as Lenin had written of an equality between nationalities and urged his colleagues to make every concession towards the minorities, the Chinese Communists wrote of the evils of 'Han chauvinism' and the need to respect cultural differences. In his earlier writings Mao argued that the Mongols, Muslims and Tibetans should be allowed to decide whether they wanted to be independent of China. However, by 1940, this had hardened into a much more limited offer of 'autonomy' within China.¹⁷

So Mao considered Tibet's inclusion within China as non-negotiable. Yet he had no intention of simply sweeping away the old system and imposing Chinese rule in Tibet. Knowing that there was no grassroots support for socialist reform in Tibet, he adopted a more gradual approach. Thus, between 1951 and 1959, the Chinese Communists courted the Tibetan aristocrats and did little to change the old hierarchical social system in Tibet. At the same time the Dalai Lama, along with most of the Tibetan elite, supported the Chinese in Tibet and suppressed Tibetans who resisted or campaigned against them.²⁰

When Ngapo got back to Lhasa, he was surprised by how little the city had changed. Having cut his hair in China, he was now told that he would not be allowed to enter Lhasa without the traditional hair-knots of a Tibetan official: as a result, he had to wait outside the city until a wig could be made for him. The Chinese generals also struggled with the slow pace of change, though for different reasons. Mao had told them that when they had an audience with the Dalai Lama they should prostrate three times in the traditional way, but they balked at this. In the end, the Tibetan cadre Puntsog Wangyal accompanied the generals wearing his Tibetan clothes and prostrated, while the Chinese just handed the Dalai Lama ceremonial scarves. When the Dalai Lama, intrigued by his first sight of a Tibetan Communist, asked why he wore traditional dress, Punwang answered good-naturedly that Communism was a revolution in ideas, not clothes. Over the next few years these two men would become unlikely friends.²¹

The three Chinese generals in Lhasa were also embroiled in their own disagreements. The two generals from the PLA's Southwest Bureau wanted to follow Mao's instructions, respecting the status quo in Tibet while slowly creating the conditions for a later grassroots movement towards Communism. But the general of the Northwest Bureau wanted to impose top-down reforms sooner rather than later. This tension surfaced again and again in the Chinese approach to Tibet, and still exists today, if in a different form.²² Meanwhile a resistance movement began to coalesce around the acting prime ministers. These two men, who had been appointed when the Dalai Lama and the Kashag had fled Lhasa, became the most vocal critics of the occupation. They spearheaded a resistance movement calling itself the Tibetan People's Party (an ironic snub to the language of Communism), which put up posters demanding that the Chinese troops leave Lhasa, organised peaceful demonstrations and wrote a petition to be presented to the Dalai Lama.

The rising tension boiled over in April 1952. As usual, Ngapo was involved. The new Tibetan Area Military Headquarters had just been established as a first step in replacing the traditional power structures of the Tibetan government. Ngapo was appointed deputy commander and attended the inauguration ceremony wearing Chinese clothes. Soon afterwards a fight broke out between some Tibetan soldiers and the Chinese soldiers who guarded Ngapo's house. The Chinese generals immediately informed Mao of the event, but Mao's response was perhaps not what they had expected. He told them that they had been moving too fast, and to put all reforms on hold indefinitely.

Despite this direct imperative from Mao, the generals did not feel confident of their position in Lhasa, and they issued a strong criticism of the prime ministers. This just made the latter more popular with the Tibetans. In the end, the generals appealed directly to the Dalai Lama, while also threatening that they could bring charges against him if he refused to depose the two prime ministers. The Dalai Lama and the Kashag, who had remained neutral so far, were forced to choose a side, and they did, deposing the prime ministers and outlawing the Tibetan People's Party. To those among the Lhasa aristocracy who had opposed the Chinese occupation, this was a clear sign that they could not rely on the Dalai Lama and his Kashag for support. Soon many of them were leaving Lhasa to join the growing émigré community across the border in Sikkim.

Stripped of the buffer that the two prime ministers had formed, the Dalai Lama was thrown into political life, though he still had the Kashag to take care of day-to-day matters. Increasingly, he relied on Ngapo for advice, at first because Ngapo was closest to the Chinese, but later because he openly and frankly told him what he thought, an unusual characteristic in a Lhasa official. As such, though some Tibetans disliked Ngapo and felt that he had sold out to the Chinese, for the Dalai Lama he became a trusted mentor. Together the pair talked about making changes to the Tibetan system of government, building schools and making life better for the peasants. The Dalai Lama was receptive to the idea of reforming Tibet; despite his cloistered life, he had learned something of the hardships of ordinary Tibetans from the sweepers who worked in the Potala, and he was convinced of the need for reform.²³

After the affair of the prime ministers, Mao drafted a directive detailing his plans for Tibet, dated 6 April 1952. He told the generals in Lhasa to take things slowly. 'The longer the delay,' he wrote, 'the stronger will be our position and the weaker theirs.' In this statement Mao showed how politically astute he was,

despite never having visited Tibet. His approach was tailor-made to undermine the Lhasa government, with its inertia and its default wait-and-see strategy. ‘Let them go on with their insensate atrocities against the people,’ he concluded, ‘while we on our part concentrate on good deeds.’

These ‘good deeds’ would swiftly bind Tibet closer to China than ever before. First, money was poured into the incredibly ambitious project of building two highways to Lhasa from China. Tens of thousands of Tibetan peasants and Chinese soldiers worked on the roads. The Tibetans were paid cash, a first for Tibet. But working in the freezing cold on high mountain passes took its toll and over three thousand people died. Next, Tibet’s international trade relationships were severed, with the Indian government happily giving up all of the trade rights that it had inherited from the British. Within a few years Tibet was completely reliant on its commerce with China, which had previously only accounted for a fifth of Tibet’s trade.²⁴

This was of little concern to most of Lhasa’s aristocrats and merchants. The Chinese paid well for all of the goods, housing and other services they needed, and they paid in silver coins which could be sold in India for many times their nominal value. Soon the general feeling towards the Chinese became much more positive – a popular saying at the time was: ‘The Chinese Communists are our kind parents; their silver coins fall like rain.’ Meanwhile, the Communists sponsored prayers and festivals at Lhasa’s three big monasteries, persuading the abbots that China would continue to be a source of religious funding, and a new state-funded school became so popular that Lhasa’s fee-paying schools were forced to close. By 1954, Lhasa also had a modern hospital, bank and post office, and most of the Tibetan officials, monks and merchants had reconciled themselves to life under Chinese rule.²⁵

In fact, enthusiasm for all things Chinese – clothes, music, ways of speech – was sweeping the upper classes. Tibetans who had been taken on tours of the new China returned speaking of the amazing modern industrial society they had seen. There was apparently no contradiction between this enthusiasm for Communist China and more traditional Tibetan values, and portraits of Mao and other leading Communists were placed on family altars. On a more practical level, Ngapo started to push forward genuine reforms in Tibet, changes that made life easier for the peasants. Setting an example to other aristocrats, he disbanded his own hereditary estates and freed the households that were bound to him. There was no longer any doubt: real change was coming to Tibet.²⁶

TIBET

COMRADES

The Dalai Lama was more cautious than some of his countrymen about the changes sweeping Tibet, but was keen to travel to China to meet Mao. The opportunity to visit Beijing came in 1954 with the inauguration of the new governing body of China, the National People's Congress. Mao and other leading Communists issued an invitation to the Dalai Lama to attend. Despite opposition from the abbots of Lhasa's three major monasteries and his own tutor, the Dalai Lama felt he should go and represent Tibet. In the end, Ngapo and the other Kashag members overruled the abbots and the invitation was accepted.

Not only the Dalai Lama, but a whole host of eminent Tibetans travelled to Beijing. The leaders of all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, including the sixteenth Karmapa, were there. The Panchen Lama and his entourage were also present. One of the terms the Chinese had insisted upon in the Seventeen-Point Agreement was that the new Panchen Lama be recognised by Lhasa and allowed to return to his seat at Tashilhunpo, escorted by the PLA. Mao hoped that the Panchen would counterbalance the continuing hostility of what he called the 'Dalai clique'.²⁷ When they met en route to Beijing, the Dalai Lama thought that the Panchen Lama, now eighteen, was less friendly and more competitive than the last time their path had crossed. The Panchen Lama immediately shook hands with the Dalai Lama in the new Chinese style, which took everyone by surprise. However, when they arrived in Beijing the Panchen Lama's entourage was dismayed to learn that Mao had instructed everyone that the Dalai Lama was to be treated as the senior of the two lamas.

Indeed, having previously had very little direct access to the Dalai Lama, Mao saw this as a unique opportunity to win him over, and was determined to make the visit a success. A few days after they arrived, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas had a meeting with the highest Party echelons, including Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Mao himself. In some ways it was a very traditional event, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas repeating the visits of their predecessors, with Chairman Mao in the emperor's role and the upper echelons of the Communist Party as his court.

At this first meeting Mao spoke effusively of his happiness that the Dalai Lama had come, and of the importance of the relationship between the Chinese and the Tibetans. This was all translated into Tibetan by Punwang. After the meeting, Mao personally held open the door for the Dalai Lama and

said, ‘Your coming to Beijing was like coming back to your own home. Whenever you come to Beijing, you can call me. You can come to my place whenever you want to. Don’t be shy. If you need anything, you just tell me directly.’ The personal touch was Mao’s usual approach when he wanted to win someone over; it certainly had the desired effect on the Dalai Lama. As the Tibetans travelled back to their quarters by car, he hugged Punwang with excitement, saying that he thought things had gone well, and that Mao was a great and unique person.²⁸

This set the tone for the trip, which despite the ongoing tension between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama was a great success. After the National People’s Congress, the Tibetans were shown the achievements of the Communist Party in modernising China (though they did not, of course, mention that many of the shipyards, factories and the like had been built by the Nationalists before 1949). The Tibetans were impressed, and none more so than the Dalai Lama himself. In conversation with Punwang and Chinese Party members, the Dalai Lama learned more about the Marxist ideal of a liberated worldwide proletariat. He was impressed by the solidarity and equality advocated by socialism, and it was not a passing fancy. He thought the communist ideal was closer to the Bodhisattva’s noble ambition of putting the welfare of others before oneself than traditional Tibetan society. The Dalai Lama came to describe himself as half-Marxist and half-Buddhist (and would still do so fifty years later), and even asked to become a member of the Communist Party itself, though his request was politely turned down.²⁹

In practical terms, the main purpose of the visit was the establishment of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Mao continued to stress that reform in Tibet had to be taken slowly, so he set up a Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region, which incorporated the Dalai Lama’s government, the Panchen Lama’s estate and the Chamdo Liberation Committee (which had been established when the PLA invaded Chamdo). In fact, this meant a significant weakening of the power of the Dalai Lama and the Kashag, as they now only represented a minority faction on the Preparatory Committee. Still, that word ‘autonomous’ seemed to promise the Dalai Lama and his government that Tibet would not be directly governed by the Party. Other changes were proposed, including the disbanding of the Tibetan army and the replacement of the Tibetan currency with Chinese money. The second was accepted, but not the first, and the Tibetan army (now reduced to a mere thousand soldiers) limped on.

TIBET

After he returned from the tour of Communist achievements in February 1955, the Dalai Lama hosted a Tibetan New Year's Day banquet in Beijing, to which he invited Mao. In conversation with the Chinese leader, the Dalai Lama agreed that he was right about Tibet. 'It is backward in various aspects,' he said, 'but we can guarantee the chairman that under your leadership and the leadership of the Communist Party, we will do a good job in various fields in Tibet and will constantly improve Tibet.' Mao made sure to have several personal conversations with the Dalai Lama, in which he continued to make a good impression upon the young Tibetan. He showed his knowledge of history by telling the Dalai Lama something that few Tibetans remembered: that a Tibetan army had once kicked the Chinese emperor out of his own capital. Mao also spoke of his fondness for Guanyin, the Chinese goddess of compassion, and of the Buddha Shakyamuni as a revolutionary who spoke for the oppressed.

On the day before he was to leave Beijing, the Dalai Lama had one last visit from the chairman. The latter praised the Dalai Lama for his scientific mind and revolutionary character, before saying, 'Of course, religion is poison.' The Dalai Lama was shocked, wondering if perhaps Mao really was to be the destroyer of Buddhism in Tibet. Still, it was hard to believe as the portly man escorted him to his car and then stood jacketless in the Beijing winter cold, waving goodbye from the roadside.³⁰

On his return journey through Kham, the Dalai Lama told the Tibetans who came out in their thousands to see him that the Chinese had come to help them and that they must accept the need for reform. The suspicion and fear he had felt on the way to Beijing had been transformed into confidence and hope. Other leading Tibetan lamas travelling back from Beijing, such as the Karmapa, also spoke to the Khampas of the material advances in China and the need for friendly relations with the Chinese. By the time the Dalai Lama arrived back in Lhasa in June 1955, his closest friends were reformists such as Ngapo and Communist Party members such as Punwang. It seemed to them that Tibet could now really change into a modern socialist country without losing its national identity. But it was not to be.³¹

UPRISING

While trying to persuade the people of Kham to cooperate with the Chinese, the Dalai Lama had been surprised by the violence of their feelings. Some even spoke

of independence from China, an idea very far from his thoughts. Yet the Khampas had reason to complain. Mao's directive that communist reform should not be forced upon the Tibetans had only been applied in the area of Tibet that was under the rule of the Dalai Lama – what was soon to be the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Mao may have been insightful in his policies for Tibet, but like most Chinese he did not think of the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau as Tibet, and he treated the Tibetans there with much less circumspection. The Party also seemed to think that the Khampas would be delighted to be liberated from the state of bonded labour, but this state was actually far less common in Kham than in the areas under the Lhasa government.

At the beginning the Party had moved slowly, getting to know the local customs and economy of Kham, setting up autonomous governing bodies and encouraging Khampas to join them and take the lead in local politics. Then, in 1953, the Party announced its first Five-Year Plan with its radical reorganisation of agriculture. This meant that land was to be 'collectivised', with the aim of moving from the ancient hierarchy of landowners and peasants to the creation of socialist cooperatives. When Party officials began these reforms they were immediately met with resistance. At first people just refused to cooperate; and in Kham, where every man carried a gun, noncooperation soon turned into violence. An amnesty for Khampas to hand in their guns proved a total failure. For one thing, many of these guns were regarded as sacred, most households keeping one on their family shrine. And the nomads were outraged when the Communists tried to tell them they had to settle in a specific area. The monasteries were particularly hard hit by land reform. They were, after all, among the wealthiest landowners; far from resenting this situation, most Khampas (indeed, most Tibetans) saw the monasteries as the bedrock of their culture.

These tensions exploded into violence in 1955, when Khampas began to attack and kill Chinese officials. When the PLA was sent in to secure the area, the rebels either fled to the hills or were sheltered in the monasteries. One of the large Gelug monasteries, Sampeling, soon became the centre of the rebellion, taking in thousands of armed Khampas on top of its usual population of three thousand monks. Many of the monks were fighters too. Sampeling had fought long and hard against Zhao the Butcher in 1906 before all of its monks had been killed. Now it faced another Chinese army. The PLA laid a siege, but the monastery was like a fortress. A few days later a plane flew over and dropped leaflets urging the monks to surrender. When they

refused, another plane flew over, and this time it dropped bombs. Within a few minutes the monastery lay in ruins, littered with the bodies of the dead and dying.

If there was a moment when the Chinese Communists lost their way in Tibet, the bombing of Sampeling in February 1956 might be it. In retrospect an attack of this sort seems almost inevitable, given the fierce independence of the Khampas and the way that the monasteries, fortified and well armed, were the natural centres of resistance. For Tibetans, it was natural that the monasteries should mix religion with politics, but this was not true of China, where Buddhists were less involved in the political system. However, in bombing the monastery, the Communists had given the Khampas reason to see them as enemies of Buddhism, and therefore of their whole belief system. After the destruction of Sampeling, the resistance moved to another major Gelug monastery, Litang. Again the PLA surrounded the monastery and laid a siege, and again the monastery refused to surrender. So a bomber plane was called in once more. Another monastery lay in ruins, hundreds more monks and ordinary Khampas lay dead.

The attitude of the Communist Party to Buddhism was in fact complex. The constitution of the People's Republic of China stipulated freedom of religious practice. But while the constitution was being officially announced, an article in the state-controlled *People's Daily* made it quite clear that there were limits to the Party's religious tolerance: 'Safeguarding the freedom of worship and safeguarding the freedom of counter-revolutionary activity are two things which absolutely must not be confused with each other. Our Constitution and all our laws, similarly, will never give any facility to those elements who carry out counter-revolutionary activities while wearing the cloak of religion.'³²

To bring Buddhism within the Party structure, a new Buddhist Association of China was set up in 1953, composed of senior Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist monks. Its president was Geshe Sherab Gyatso, the eminent lama who had once been a close friend of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, but had fallen out with him and ended up in China. He was now a Communist, walking a fine line between criticising Buddhists and attempting to protect Buddhist institutions from the excesses of communist reform. In one lecture Sherab Gyatso said that Buddhist monasteries were inhabited by pessimists, failures and criminals trying to escape from reality; Buddhists, he said, had better support the Communist Party and follow the socialist road. But at the 1956 National People's Congress he spoke of the need to reassure the monks that

they would be financially secure, and urged that nobody should be forced to join a cooperative against their will.³³

At this same meeting many Chinese delegates went even further, laying the blame for the revolts squarely on ‘Han chauvinism’, the arrogance of the Chinese officials and their lack of sensitivity to the local people.³⁴ It was generally agreed that reforms had to be introduced slowly and with cultural sensitivity, and that Tibetans, not Chinese, should make the key decisions. Yet, in all these expressions of good intentions, the Chinese demonstrated a fatal blind spot about those Tibetans who lived outside Central Tibet. The latter were left out of these considerations and continued to be subjected to socialist land reform – and hence continued to resist.³⁵

If the Communists thought that the problems in Kham were only of local significance, they were wrong. Refugees fleeing the bombed monasteries crossed the Yangtse river and, with nowhere else to go, headed for Lhasa. Once across the border, they were surprised to find the Chinese soldiers polite and non-threatening, and on arriving in the capital they were equally surprised at the hostility of the Tibetans. At best, the Lhasa Tibetans were indifferent to their plight; at worst, they resented the increasing presence in their city of Khampas whom they tended to see as troublemakers or even bandits. As the number of Khampas in Lhasa swelled into the thousands, food prices rocketed and there was trouble in the streets. The Chinese soldiers stationed in Lhasa were getting jumpy.

The tension was also being ratcheted up by a new anti-Chinese group, the People’s Assembly, which had been formed when the Dalai Lama first left for Beijing. Its name provocatively echoed that of the organisation that had been banned by the Dalai Lama a few years before, but it was different in that it was composed of lower-ranking officials and traders outside the aristocratic elite. The organisation moved on from the usual posters demanding the removal of Chinese troops from Lhasa to constructive activities such as welfare work for Lhasa’s growing refugee community. But neither the Dalai Lama nor his government was willing to support the People’s Assembly. At the insistence of the Chinese generals, the Kashag summoned the leaders of the rebellion and castigated them for endangering the relationship between China and Tibet. One minister told them that the people should not get involved in affairs of state. Then the three leaders of the People’s Assembly were thrown into prison, where they were interrogated for several months. One of them died; the other two went into exile in Kalimpong after they were released.

Trapped between the needs of the Tibetan people on the one hand, and their Chinese masters on the other, the Dalai Lama was feeling increasingly despondent when he received an invitation to the festivities in India for the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's birth. Though the Chinese were far from keen to let him go, fearing that he would be influenced by the pro-independence Tibetan exiles there, he jumped at the opportunity. So, in November 1956, the Dalai Lama, Ngapo and another two Kashag ministers arrived in New Delhi, where they were met and warmly welcomed by Prime Minister Nehru. The very next day the Dalai Lama made a pilgrimage to the site on the banks of the Jamuna river where Gandhi had been cremated. Praying there, he made a resolution that would guide him in the years to come: that Gandhi's approach of *ahimsa*, non-violence, was the best way to conduct politics.³⁶ Over the next few days, the Dalai Lama had a chance to talk to Nehru and pour out his woes; Nehru would offer no promises, but in an attempt to be helpful he visited the Dalai Lama's hotel room with a copy of the Seventeen-Point Agreement and went through it point by point, explaining where there might be room to challenge the Chinese.

Despite the lack of explicit support, the Dalai Lama was heartened by the good will of the Indian politicians, and the experience of Indian democracy gave him a new sense of the shortcomings of Chinese communism. As the festivities came to an end and still the Dalai Lama did not return to Tibet, the Chinese government began to grow concerned: it knew that the Tibetan exiles wanted the Dalai Lama to stay in India with them and press for independence. The Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, who was also in India for the celebrations, arranged to meet with the Dalai Lama and worked hard to assuage his concerns. Zhou also met with the three ministers from the Kashag who were in India. Ngapo took this opportunity to give Zhou a blunt assessment of China's blunders in Tibet, telling him that the Chinese had ignored the feelings of the Tibetan people, and that the number of Chinese soldiers and officials in Lhasa needed to be drastically reduced. He also demanded that the two sacked prime ministers be reinstated. In response, Zhou spoke soothing words, but the changes that Ngapo asked for never happened.³⁷

In January 1957, the Dalai Lama returned to Kalimpong and plunged straight into discussions with the Tibetan exiles – including two of his brothers – about whether he should go back to Tibet. His brothers were strongly against it. In the end, it was Ngapo, still the Dalai Lama's most trusted advisor, who tipped the balance in favour of returning. He suggested that the

Dalai Lama should stay in India if there was a realistic plan about how to proceed in exile; otherwise should return. The Dalai Lama recognised that in the continuing absence of foreign support, especially from India, there was no real alternative, so, despite the tears and anger of his brothers, he crossed the border again in March 1957 to make a last attempt to work with the Chinese.

But things were going from bad to worse in Tibet, as the uprising in Kham began to spread to Central Tibet as well. The Dalai Lama wrote a letter to the Khampas asking them to cooperate with the Chinese. The Karmapa, the most influential lama in Kham, instructed the massed crowds attending his teachings that the fighting must stop. In a talk to Amdo herdsmen in 1957, the Communist Party lama Geshe Sherab Gyatso made it clear that Buddhist principles against taking life would not apply to those who opposed the Communists: 'Killing rats and locusts is compatible with our religion. We kill not only locusts, but also any harmful elements such as imperialists and counter-revolutionaries.'³⁸

Another approach was advocated by a learned scholar from the Kagyu school, Khenpo Kangshar. In summer 1957, he had a Damascene conversion while meditating on a mountain and watching the snows melting away; he saw this as an omen of unprecedented changes in Tibet. Recognising it as a chance to radically reform Tibetan Buddhism, he put aside his life of learning and monastic vows, and began to teach in a direct and unorthodox way, breaking all kinds of taboos, including the centuries-old barrier between lay and monastic Buddhists. Khenpo Kangshar told his students that if the Tibetans lost their monasteries and could not practise their rituals, they would have to build their temples within themselves and embody the words that summarise the very heart of the Buddha's teachings: 'Cease to do what is bad, practise what is good, and tame your mind.' He too urged the Tibetans not to fight the Chinese.³⁹

But the fighting in Kham did not stop. The Party told the Kashag that it was its responsibility to deal with the rebels in political Tibet, but the Kashag replied that, since there was no Tibetan army to speak of, there was little it could do. It did, however, expel several hundred Khampa refugees from Lhasa. By now the Khampas had become deeply disappointed by the lack of support from the Dalai Lama and his government, and they continued to feel that there was little or no recognition of the Khampa values and culture in Central Tibet. Then a wealthy Khampa trader called Gonpo Tashi had an idea that would

bring the Khampas and Central Tibetans together. He began to raise money for the construction of a marvellous golden throne as a religious offering to the Dalai Lama. Tibetans from Central Tibet as well as Kham donated generously.

This golden throne became a symbol of the shared values of the Tibetan people and the centrality of Buddhism to their lives. It also polarised the Tibetan people and the Chinese Communists, since the latter had no understanding of these rituals and were deeply suspicious of Gonpo Tashi. The throne was offered to the Dalai Lama soon after his return to Lhasa in the summer of 1957. That was by no means the end of Gonpo Tashi's activities, however. The networks he had created while fundraising for the throne became the first major organised revolutionary militia in Tibet, which he called the Four Rivers Six Ranges, the old nickname for Kham. Some fifteen thousand Khampa warriors gathered under his banner in Lhoka, near Tibet's southern border and out of the range of the PLA, which had yet to extend its control to such areas.

The exiles in Kalimpong were very excited by these developments, and they worked quickly to put the Khampa revolutionaries in touch with the US government. Both of the Dalai Lama's older brothers had been talking to the Americans, and had been encouraged by their increasing interest in supporting the Tibetans in the name of the fight against global communism. When it heard of the Four Rivers Six Ranges, the CIA decided to abandon the idea of influencing the Dalai Lama, who had proved uninterested in its offers of support, and to work with the rebels instead. In 1958, the CIA began to train a selected few Khampas at a base in Taiwan. It also began to make covert arms drops into Kham itself.

As the Four Rivers Six Ranges succeeded in killing more and more Chinese soldiers, popular feeling in Tibet turned in their favour. The usual prejudice against Khampa 'bandits' was replaced by the respect owed to defenders of the faith. Some of the Tibetan high officials also secretly supported the rebels. The Dalai Lama's chamberlain told them that the guns that had belonged to the disbanded Tibetan army were being kept in a certain monastery. To avoid any appearance of collusion, the rebels pretended to lay siege to the monastery while the monks let them take the weapons. After this came more successful attacks against the PLA, and the Chinese had to accept that the uprising in Kham had turned into a full-scale Tibetan rebellion.⁴⁰

FLIGHT

The scene was set for some kind of showdown. In early 1957, Mao had given a long lecture in Beijing on the theme of ‘contradictions among the people’. He talked of the disagreements (or ‘contradictions’) within the Party, within China and between the Han Chinese and the national minorities. When he spoke of the latter, it was clear that Tibet was very much on his mind. Mao said that the problem in Tibet was Han chauvinism. He promised again that no reforms would be carried out without the agreement of the Tibetans. He talked of the Dalai Lama’s visit to India and the exile community in Kalimpong. The general theme of Mao’s speech was that Communist China needed discussion, criticism and contending voices if it was to go forward. In a famous phrase, he said, ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend.’ Thousands of Chinese took Mao at his word and criticisms of the Communist Party were voiced openly for the first time, including condemnation of cultural insensitivity and rash reforms in Tibetan areas. Then, when the criticisms showed no sign of abating, Mao performed one of the U-turns that so often caught his opponents off-guard. A crackdown under the name of the ‘anti-Rightist movement’, headed by another leading Party member, Deng Xiaoping, swiftly and violently crushed the ‘hundred flowers’.

The effects of this crackdown were soon felt in Kham, as those who had criticised Han chauvinism, though they were merely echoing Mao’s instructions, were themselves criticised and punished. Among the victims was Punwang, the leading Tibetan Communist. He was detained in Beijing, criticised for encouraging Tibetan nationalism and then thrown into jail. This loyal and idealistic Party member was to spend nearly two decades in prison. When the Dalai Lama heard of Punwang’s fall, it dealt a serious blow to what remained of his faith in the Chinese Communists as a genuinely beneficial force for implementing Marxist ideals.⁴¹ The campaign to eliminate Punwang came from the top Chinese officials in Kham and Lhasa, who felt threatened by his criticisms. Once his voice had been silenced, these officials were free to talk about the problem in Kham differently. Talk of ‘Han chauvinism’ was replaced by attacks on ‘local nationalism’ as the blame was shifted from the Chinese officials to the Khampas themselves. This attitude hardened further when one of the CIA-trained Khampas was captured by the Chinese.

Then, in the summer of 1958, Mao started to drive the Communist revolution off the rails. He announced that it was entering a new phase, a ‘Great Leap

Forward', by means of which China would become a rival to Britain and America in its production and prosperity. The rural cooperatives would be joined together into massive communes and production would be increased by encouraging everybody to work harder. It is now generally agreed that Mao's Great Leap Forward was a disaster, leading to one of China's worst famines and the untimely deaths of 35 million people.⁴² It also pushed the unstable situation in Tibet over the edge. Party officials in Sichuan (which contained the eastern half of Kham) were among the most zealous in putting Mao's utopian vision into practice. As the land reforms became increasingly aggressive, more Khampas fled towards Lhasa to live as refugees or join the rebels, and as attacks on monasteries and monks increased, the lamas began to leave as well. Senior lamas were now being taken prisoner if there was any suspicion of their being involved with the rebels. The Jamgon Kongtrul tulku, for example, was captured and imprisoned when he went to administer funeral rites to a group of Khampas who were in open rebellion against the Chinese.⁴³

Anybody could have seen that a cataclysm was coming, but nobody could have predicted the precise way in which it would come about. At the beginning of 1959, the Tibetan government was paralysed, unwilling to support the Khampa rebels and unable to stop the rebellion. The Dalai Lama was preoccupied with his studies, the last stages of the long course that led to the degree of Geshe. The final examinations were due to take place at the beginning of the Tibetan New Year, coinciding with the Great Prayer Festival. They would be attended by the whole of the monastic community of Lhasa, and would be a great spectacle.

Just at this crucial time, the Chinese generals resident in Lhasa were summoned back to China, leaving the inexperienced Tan Guansen in charge. Tan wanted to organise a Chinese celebration for the Dalai Lama's graduation and suggested that the Dalai Lama might like to host a Chinese-trained dance troupe in his residence at the Norbulingka. The Dalai Lama replied that the Norbulingka was too small, so they agreed instead on the auditorium at the PLA headquarters. When he was asked to set a date, the Dalai Lama stalled and said he would do so after the Great Prayer Festival. After that, he put it out of his mind; nobody else seems to have known at this stage about the rather vague plan for a Chinese celebration. The examinations took place at the beginning of March, with the Dalai Lama moving in a stately procession through each of the three great monasteries. First he was examined in Drepung, then Sera, and finally in Ganden. He stood and debated points of

logic and epistemology with undergraduates and then with senior masters. At each monastery he was watched by thousands of monks. It was the last time Tibet would see such a vast gathering of monks for a religious ceremony. After the examinations the Dalai Lama returned to the Norbulingka in a spectacular procession, carried on a golden throne and escorted by Tibetan soldiers dressed in the manner of the ancient Tibetan empire.

Two days later, after the Great Prayer Festival had drawn to a close, Tan reminded the Dalai Lama about the dance troupe and asked him to set a date for the celebration. The Dalai Lama, whose thoughts had understandably been elsewhere, suggested three days hence, on the 10th. Since neither he nor Tan had previously informed the Tibetan officials about the event, it was only when it was announced on the day before that people first learned of it. It even took Ngapo by surprise. Some of the Dalai Lama's monk officials became intensely anxious. They had been worrying for some time that the Chinese would invite the Dalai Lama to Beijing after his graduation, and that they would not let him return. There was also the fact that Tan had asked the Dalai Lama to come without his usual bodyguard. When he heard of the planned celebration, one of the officials, Barshi, was heard to say, 'It's all over.'

Barshi now set about alerting the monks of Lhasa to the imminent departure of the Dalai Lama to the Chinese camp. He wrote a letter to the heads of Drepung and Sera monasteries with instructions for the monks to come and 'pay their respects' to the Dalai Lama before he left. As he was only a minor official, he borrowed the seal of a senior official to stamp his work, making it look as though it came from a higher authority. Then he and some other junior officials went to the Norbulingka and tried to persuade the Dalai Lama not to go. But the Dalai Lama dismissed their fears, and insisted on attending the show.

Having failed to dissuade the Dalai Lama, Barshi and another junior official decided that they had better make sure that he was unable to leave the Norbulingka. They headed towards Lhasa city centre, one on a bicycle and one on a horse, to spread the news of the imminent celebration and their belief that it was a ruse to abduct the Dalai Lama. The tense atmosphere in Lhasa ensured that the rumour was widely believed and swiftly disseminated. People began to gather around the Norbulingka in the early hours of 10 March, and by mid-morning thousands were assembled outside the main gates, demanding to see the Dalai Lama so that they could know that he was safe and would not go to the Chinese camp.

The crowd was teeming with wild rumours that were 'falling like hailstones', as one person put it. Their anger was directed not only at the Chinese, but also at the Tibetan officials who they believed were endangering the Dalai Lama by their compliance with the Chinese. They shouted at the officials: 'Don't sell the Dalai Lama for Chinese coins!' One official, Sampo, who had been a signatory to the Seventeen-Point Agreement, was pulled out of his jeep and attacked when he arrived at the Norbulingka wearing Chinese clothes. Another Tibetan official turned up in his traditional Tibetan clothes but changed into a shirt, trousers and Chinese cap after he left again. As he watched the crowd he was spotted and accused of spying for the Chinese. Suddenly people started throwing stones and hitting him, and within minutes he had been beaten to death. Still the crowd continued to beat the bloody corpse.

The junior officials who had instigated the gathering had no idea it would become so volatile or that such anger might be directed against the Tibetan ruling class. The ordinary Tibetans, left out of the picture by the Chinese Communists and the Tibetan government for the last nine years, were at last making their voices heard and their rallying point was the Dalai Lama himself. Trapped inside the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama was dismayed by the mob and certain that the demonstrations could only end in mass violence and death. He sent a message to the people telling them that they had no business staging disturbances and should return to their homes at once.

Meanwhile, the crowd outside the Norbulingka was beginning to appoint representatives and a leadership was emerging, drawn from the ordinary people rather than the aristocracy. Sixty of these representatives were invited inside, and the Dalai Lama's message was relayed to them. They agreed to tell the crowd to leave, as long as a 'bodyguard' could keep watch over the Norbulingka's gates. The crowd then began to return to Lhasa, still angry, shouting, 'Tibet is independent! Chinese leave Tibet!' The corpse of the murdered Tibetan official was dragged along on a rope. The crowd surged round the Barkhor, Lhasa's central square, the traditional religious act of circumambulation now an expression of political protest.⁴⁴

The Lhasa aristocracy was completely unprepared for this uprising of the common people, and at first did not understand its significance. That afternoon much of the upper stratum of Tibetan society dutifully turned up at the Chinese camp to enjoy the entertainments laid on by the PLA. When the Kashag ministers arrived without the Dalai Lama, they first faced disappointed rows of Tibetan schoolchildren, who had been made to stand there holding

silk scarves and flowers, and then the anger of Tan himself, who was hardly able to bear this seeming slight.⁴⁵ Making the best of things, Tan despatched a letter to the Dalai Lama advising him to stay put and not to attend the show. The Dalai Lama sent a reply the next day in which he apologised to the general, writing that ‘reactionary, evil elements are carrying out activities endangering me under the pretext of protecting my safety’.⁴⁶

By this time, things had calmed down around the Norbulingka, but demonstrations were being organised elsewhere across Lhasa. The demonstrators were drawn from the ordinary people of Lhasa, the Khampa refugees and the monks from the three major monasteries. One demonstration was held by the Tibetan Women’s Association. More and more people were openly calling for Tibetan independence. One group of demonstrators tried to attack Ngapo’s house, but they were turned back by PLA soldiers. In fact, Ngapo was by now the only member of the Kashag who had not taken refuge inside the Norbulingka (apart from Sampo, who was in hospital recovering from his injuries). He was busy trying to keep the lines of communication open between the Dalai Lama and General Tan, and on 15 March arranged for the delivery of another letter from the general, suggesting that the Dalai Lama should make his way secretly to the PLA camp, where he would be protected. Ngapo also knew that the general had decided to use force to disperse the crowd and he included another letter in his own hand telling the Dalai Lama of the danger.

Along with the letter Ngapo sent a map of the Norbulingka and asked the Dalai Lama to mark his position on it so that the Chinese shells could be aimed elsewhere. The Dalai Lama wrote a reply to the general stating that he would make his way to the camp as soon as he could, but he did not reply to Ngapo or return the map. His thoughts were turning to escape in a different direction. The Kashag had decided that the best way to defuse the situation was to spirit the Dalai Lama out of the Norbulingka secretly. It hoped that the demonstrators would disperse once their focus had been removed. A coded message was given to the lord chamberlain to ‘snatch the egg without frightening the hen’.

Then, in the early morning of the 17th, two shells were fired from the Chinese camp towards the Norbulingka, landing harmlessly in an ornamental pond and in the marsh outside the palace wall. The Dalai Lama consulted the Nechung oracle about whether to stay or flee. Though the oracle had previously encouraged him to stay, it now gave a clear message: ‘Go. Go now!’ The young monk possessed by the oracle even drew a map with an escape route to

India. As a result, that afternoon the Dalai Lama's officials and family, his mother, sister and younger brother, began to leave the Norbulingka, some hidden in the back of a truck, some disguised as pilgrims. The first hurdle was to get past the crowd outside the palace walls, the second to evade the PLA.

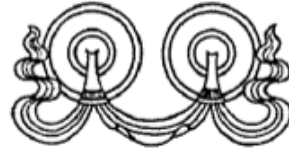
It was after nightfall when the Dalai Lama himself left, wearing a long black cloak and carrying only a rifle and a silk painting that had belonged to the second Dalai Lama. It seemed that his letters to Tan had convinced the Chinese that he was not contemplating fleeing Lhasa, so he was able to slip out of the city with relative ease. His destination was Lhuntse Dzong, near the border with India.

By the next morning rumours of the Dalai Lama's flight began circulating, but many did not believe them, and it would be another couple of days before the Chinese got wind of the escape. The demonstrators had already begun fortifying Lhasa and training the remaining Tibetan machine guns on the Chinese camp. In response, the Chinese guns were aimed at the demonstrators. On the afternoon of 20 March, the Chinese camp began firing warning shots towards the Norbulingka again in an attempt to disperse the crowd. That night, it deployed soldiers across the barricade that divided Lhasa into its northern and southern districts.

As dawn broke, the fighting began. It was almost a repeat performance of the bloody battles that had resulted in the Chinese soldiers being expelled from Lhasa in 1912. Back then the odds had been on the side of the Tibetans, who had the support of the thirteenth Dalai Lama's war council and were fighting soldiers demoralised by the implosion of the Manchu empire. This time the odds were very much on the side of the Chinese. The bloody fighting in the streets continued for three days, with the Chinese gradually getting the upper hand. On the morning of the 23rd, the last of the Tibetan resistance had gathered around the ancient Jokhang temple. Khampa gunmen climbed onto the temple roof and set up machine-gun turrets. The walls were surrounded by Khampa horsemen, as well as a vast crowd of protestors slowly circumambulating the symbol of Tibet's ancient culture. The Chinese fired on the temple and the Khampas fired back. The fighting continued for three hours, with heavy casualties on both sides, until finally a Chinese tank rumbled through the main gate of the Jokhang and into the courtyard. Later that day the Chinese red flag was raised over the Potala. The uprising was over.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama had arrived in Lhuntse Dzong, but when he and his ministers heard of the fighting in Lhasa and the declarations from the

Chinese that the rebel ministers would be caught and punished, they realised that remaining in Tibet was no longer an option. Later it turned out that some of the rumours – for example, that the Norbulingka and the Potala had been destroyed – were false, but there was no way of knowing that at the time. First of all, the Dalai Lama and his ministers issued a public rejection of the Seventeen-Point Agreement on the grounds that the Chinese had breached their side of the deal. Then they moved on again. As they travelled they were joined by two Khampa rebels who had been trained by the CIA and were carrying a radio transmitter. Using this, the Dalai Lama sent a message to Nehru, to ask for asylum in India. The answer came back in the affirmative. Despite later claims from China, this seems to have been the only direct role played by the CIA in the Lhasa uprising and the flight of the Dalai Lama. After a few more days of travel the Dalai Lama crossed the border into India. Journalists from all over the world were waiting for him, eager to report on the sensational story of the Dalai Lama's escape. A new chapter in Tibet's history had begun.



10

Two Tibets, 1959 to the Present

INTO EXILE

As the Dalai Lama arrived in exile, news of the rebellion and the PLA's response was spreading fast. The heads of the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, including Sakya Trizin, the Karmapa and Dudjom Rinpoche, swiftly fled into exile too. Many other lamas tried to follow. Some were caught by the PLA and imprisoned. Some died on the journey. Many of those who actually escaped went first to the Buddhist countries of Sikkim and Bhutan. Others, including a large group of the defeated Khampa rebels, crossed the border into Nepal, where they were received sympathetically by King Mahendra.

Tens of thousands more Tibetans were following the Dalai Lama to India, fleeing the crackdown that was the inevitable consequence of the violence in Lhasa. Nehru assured the Dalai Lama that he was welcome in India, while at the same time insisting that he could not support the Dalai Lama's calls for the independence of Tibet or recognise his wish to set up a Tibetan government in exile. Nehru also accepted that India would look after the Tibetan refugees pouring across the border. It was a brave decision, considering that China was India's most powerful neighbour. Indeed, it was the beginning of the end for friendly relations between India and China.

India's generosity towards the Tibetans was staggering. Vast amounts of government money were spent on refugee camps, food rations and medical aid. Thousands of Tibetan peasants were given paid work on road-building projects. International aid poured in as well, especially from Switzerland and

the USA. Taking advantage of the sudden international interest in Tibet, the Dalai Lama was soon giving press conferences and meeting foreign ambassadors. His first major publicity victory was to get a resolution tabled by Malaysia, Ireland and Thailand at the UN, and a resolution was narrowly passed calling for 'the respect of the fundamental human rights of the Tibetan people and for their distinctive cultural and religious life'.¹

Another piece of positive publicity arrived with the publication of a report by the International Commission of Jurists (which, despite its name, was only a prestigious NGO) accusing China of a deliberate violation of human rights in Tibet, and more specifically 'a systematic policy of killing, imprisonment and deportation of those opposed to the regime'. Even more strikingly, the report alleged that the Chinese treatment of the Tibetans constituted genocide as defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention of the United Nations.² Sympathetic countries were soon offering to take in Tibetans, although the only countries to accept significant numbers were Canada and Switzerland. Even here, however, the numbers were tiny compared to India.³

In 1960, Nehru suggested that the Dalai Lama could settle in the northwest Indian town of Dharamsala: specifically, in the suburb of McLeod Ganj, an old British hill station. This became the headquarters of what the Tibetans considered their government in exile, which went public under the name 'The Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama'. Among themselves, they were still the Kashag, the council of ministers who had ruled Tibet for centuries. No nation was willing to recognise the Dalai Lama's new exile government but more clandestine aid was coming from the USA. Despite the scattering of the Khampa rebellion, the CIA intensified its military support to the rebels, who were now mostly based in the Nepalese kingdom of Mustang, just across the border from Tibet. While the Dalai Lama avoided any contact with the CIA or the rebels, his brother Gyalo Thondup enthusiastically took charge of these dealings.⁴

In one spectacularly successful mission the rebels captured a satchel filled with secret Communist Party documents, which they passed on to the CIA. But day-to-day life was hard for the rebels, exiled from their homes, dependent on air-drops from American planes and plagued by internal quarrels. At the same time, the political elite of the exile Tibetans was also split by a dispute with Gyalo Thondup at its centre. The government in exile, still composed of the old Kashag, considered the Dalai Lama's brother a troublemaker, and a shady character to boot, with his overseas business interests and secret service

contacts. A particular bone of contention was the money that the Dalai Lama had sent out of Tibet in the early 1950s, mostly in gold bullion. Gyalo had been made responsible for the money, but when the Dalai Lama arrived in India he soon discovered that it had disappeared. Bad investments, Gyalo said, but the Kashag was not convinced.

It was, in fact, much more than a personal feud. The Dalai Lama and his ministers represented a political system that had changed little over the past two centuries. Some Tibetans felt that the Kashag was ill-equipped to represent Tibet in the modern world. Gyalo Thondup and other modernisers were keen to introduce communist ideals and methods to the new Tibetan government in exile. This is not as surprising as it might sound, considering that communist China had provided their main experiences of non-traditional government. And there were many voices in India, including Nehru's, suggesting that communist and socialist ideals were the way forward for post-colonial Asia. Over the next few years one member of the Kashag after another resigned, until the entire old guard was gone. The new officials who took their places were not all drawn from the highest level of the old aristocracy, and some argued that they were therefore better able to deal with the modern world.⁵

Meanwhile, relations between India and China reached breaking point in a dispute over the border between Tibet and India, the McMahon Line agreed at the Simla convention. Nehru treated it as a legitimate boundary; since the Simla Agreement had been ratified by Tibet, this was tantamount to recognising that Tibet had been an independent state before 1950. And that was, of course, unacceptable to the Chinese leadership. So the Sino-Indian War, which erupted into open fighting in October 1962, was in this sense a war over Tibet. The conflict provided a new role for the Khampa rebels, many of whom were recruited into the Indian army, in the new Special Frontier Force, a commando unit patrolling one of the highest borders in the world. After the Indian army had been thoroughly beaten by the PLA, a ceasefire was called in November. Yet no agreement was reached about the border, which has remained a politically poisonous issue to this day.⁶

By the early 1960s, with the Dalai Lama showing no signs of returning to Tibet, it was becoming clear that there were now two Tibetan governments. The Dalai Lama and the remnants of the traditional Tibetan ruling elite were determined, with or without Nehru's support, to present themselves as Tibet's government in exile. At the same time, the influential Tibetans who remained in Lhasa, such as Ngapo and the Panchen Lama, had been elevated to the posi-

tion of leaders, though with little real power. From now on there would also be two versions of what was happening inside Tibet: one emanating from Chinese state media and the announcements of officials such as Ngapo, the other from the Dalai Lama and his ministers.

THE WARM EMBRACE OF THE MOTHERLAND

As far as the Chinese Communist Party was concerned, the strategy of appeasing the aristocracy, working with the Dalai Lama and introducing reform slowly had failed. From now on Tibet would come directly under Chinese rule – or, as it was called in the Communist literature, ‘the warm embrace of the Motherland’. All traditional Tibetan forms of government were swept away. Zhou Enlai announced that the Tibetans had torn up the Seventeen-Point Agreement themselves and that the old ‘local government’ of Tibet was therefore now defunct. The Chinese administrative structure, the Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region, would now run Tibet directly. In the absence of the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama would head the committee, while Ngapo found himself suddenly elevated to the position of vice-chairman. Yet these two men had little genuine authority. The real power lay in the PLA’s Military Control Committee, headed by Zhang Guohua, one of the generals who had come to Lhasa in 1951. For many years to come Tibet would be run by the military, a *de facto* police state.

Other changes happened quickly, wiping out centuries of tradition in a few sudden strokes. The thousands of monks who had fought in the rebellion were captured and sent to labour camps. Naturally enough, the Party had no intention of allowing such numbers of hostile monks to gather in the monasteries again. Lamas and aristocrats who had supported the rebellion but not managed to escape were now subjected to ‘struggle sessions’ in which they were berated and beaten by both Chinese and Tibetans.

Those who were suspected of any kind of involvement in the uprising were targeted by an ‘Elimination of the Rebellion’ campaign. Tibetans working for the Party identified former colleagues who were accused of being involved. The crackdown spread beyond Lhasa as lamas and aristocrats living in places such as Sakya were accused of ‘reactionary rebellion to separate Tibet from the Motherland’. More Tibetans fled into exile. That summer the Panchen Lama made a public statement announcing that the old feudal system would be buried and replaced with ‘the people’s democratic system’. Ngapo gave a more detailed

version: first, the rebellion would be cut down; then, the system of obligatory labour service to manorial lords would be abolished and rents would be reduced; and, finally, the land would be redistributed according to socialist principles.

Having failed to win over the Tibetan aristocracy, the Communists now turned belatedly to the Tibetan masses. Bonded labour, in which families were owned by a local lord and bound to his land, a tradition that stretched back as far as Tibetan history itself, was dissolved. All Tibetans were now free. But free for what? That question was to be answered by countless education sessions and political rallies. These were led by Chinese and Tibetan Communists who spoke of the inequalities of traditional Tibetan society and the joys of the new order. There were many grievances to be aired, hardly surprisingly given the near-absolute power that Tibetan landowners had wielded over their bonded peasants. On the other hand, some of these events were clearly stage-managed by the Party. On 15 April, there was a large demonstration by Tibetans in Lhasa calling for 'the thorough quelling of the rebellion'. It had been made quite clear that anyone who failed to participate would be regarded as sympathetic to the rebellion.⁷

There were deep inequalities inherent in the old Tibetan manorial system, and many peasants were glad to see the end of the dominance of the aristocratic families who had owned their households and the fruits of their labour for more generations than anyone could remember. On the other hand, the fact that these reforms were imposed by the Chinese and accompanied by propaganda campaigns against traditional Tibetan society and religion left some feeling that everything they held dear was under attack. The most obvious and alarming development was the sudden collapse of the monasteries. The monastic estates were the biggest landowners in Tibet, and it was through their taxation of the local community that they were able to support such vast numbers of monks. Since the land reforms stripped Tibet's monks and nuns of the means to support themselves, almost all of Tibet's monasteries were now forced to close. In the space of a few years, the Party effectively ended the dominance of monks and monasteries in Tibet.⁸

THE WASTELAND

In 1962, the Panchen Lama, shocked at the suppression of Tibetan culture and religion, did something astonishingly brave. He wrote down his criticisms of the Communist Party's activities in Tibet in a top-secret internal memo which

was submitted to Mao and Zhou Enlai. The memo, later known as 'The Seventy Thousand Character Petition', was an amazing document, written in the jargon of the Party but levelling trenchant criticisms against its behaviour in Tibetan areas. For example, the Panchen Lama wrote that 'because rebellions have taken place in the majority of Tibetan areas, this has produced in a portion of our cadres and military officers behaviour such as disliking Tibetans, maliciously discriminating against Tibetans, violating their national characteristics and prohibiting their customs and habits'. The Panchen Lama also wrote that of the 2,500 monasteries that existed in 1959, only seventy remained open by 1962, an incredible reduction of 97 per cent in less than three years.⁹

At first the petition was cautiously accepted and concessions were made. For example, the Panchen Lama's monastery at Tashilhunpo was allowed to house two thousand monks, and monasteries elsewhere in Tibet were to be allowed a total of three thousand more, all receiving a stipend from the government. But later that year the Party took another of its periodic swings towards authoritarianism (or, in the official language, 'ultra-Leftism'). The Chinese generals in Lhasa used the Panchen Lama's petition against him, claiming that Mao himself had called it 'a poisoned arrow' and labelling him a reactionary. He was arrested and subjected to violent struggle sessions before being confined in the feared Qincheng prison, a place where leading political prisoners were kept in solitary confinement and subjected to physical and psychological torture.¹⁰

By now it was clear that the Communists wanted a Tibetan figurehead but would not tolerate any actual criticism of their policies. That left only the old political pragmatist Ngapo. When the Tibetan Autonomous Region finally became a reality in 1965, Ngapo was appointed the first governor of Tibet. His role was largely symbolic: as the leader of the team that had signed the Seventeen-Point Agreement, his presence validated Mao's claim that Tibet had been peacefully 'liberated'. At China's National Day celebrations, in October 1966, Ngapo stood behind Chairman Mao and other leading members of the Chinese Communist Party, looking down upon hundreds of thousands of people massed in Tiananmen Square. These people were mostly young, wearing quasi-military uniforms with red armbands and waving copies of the little red book of Mao's sayings. They were the Red Guards, who were about to wage a campaign of terror and destruction throughout China. Ngapo was lucky to have Mao's personal support, for now every remaining shred of the old culture of Tibet would be under attack in the orgy of violence and destruction that was the Cultural Revolution.

Mao himself was encouraging and manipulating the Cultural Revolution as a means of positioning himself as the unassailable leader of China. Since the failures of the utopian Great Leap Forward, Mao had found himself increasingly sidelined by economic realists such as Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi. Liu had taken Mao's place as the chairman of the People's Republic of China in 1959, and by 1966 Mao had decided to destroy him. His strategy to do this involved harnessing the unrest of young students in China's cities, encouraging them to attack teachers, professors and university administrators. With Mao's increasingly open support, more and more students joined the revolutionary movement. These so-called Red Guards were absolutely fanatical, violently cruel, and treated Mao as a godlike figure. By the autumn, their persecution had spread to landlords and business people as well as those whose parents or grandparents were from these backgrounds. Millions of copies of Mao's red book were printed and brandished by the Red Guards. Hundreds of thousands of people, often old men and women, were subjected to struggle sessions in which they were verbally and physically abused by screaming teenagers: many were actually killed, while others committed suicide afterwards.

The ideology behind these acts of violence was elucidated by Mao as the elimination of the 'four olds': old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits. By October 1966, this ideology had become an excuse for cultural vandalism on a scale never seen before: in Beijing alone, 4,922 of the 6,843 officially designated 'places of cultural or historical interest' were destroyed by the Red Guards. Massive piles of books were burned, temples were levelled and statues smashed to pieces. The Forbidden City survived only because Zhou Enlai deployed the army to protect it.¹¹ And while the social and political factors behind the Cultural Revolution were quite specific to China, politics in Tibet was now merely an adjunct to events in Beijing. So when General Zhang Guohua, leader of the military government of Tibet, was ordered to bring the Cultural Revolution to Tibet, he realised that he would have to act fast.

Since the Red Guard movement was a Chinese phenomenon, manipulating the frustrations of the young with the education system and their own limited opportunities, a Tibetan Red Guard movement would have to be artificially created. By doing this, General Zhang hoped to prevent Red Guards coming in from China and undermining his own administration in Tibet. Following Mao's recent proclamations, the focus for the new Tibetan Red Guards was to be the destruction of the 'four olds'. Pamphlets appeared demanding the

eradication of feudal culture. Religious objects such as books, stupas and prayer flags were to be destroyed. All religious festivals were to be abolished and acts such as reciting mantras, prostrating and circumambulating sacred sites were to be banned. Monasteries were to be converted for general public use while monks and nuns married and engaged in productive labour. Nobody was to be allowed even a personal shrine, and photographs of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas were to be destroyed.¹²

The first spontaneous act of destruction was carried out by the Tibetan and Chinese Red Guards from the Lhasa Secondary School. They stormed the Jokhang temple, the most potent emblem of ancient Tibetan culture. The students carried out Buddhist books, piled them in the courtyard and set fire to them. They pulled down and smashed the statues, including the ancient Jowo statue said to have been brought to Tibet during the time of Songtsen Gampo. This was just the first act of revolutionary vandalism. Afterwards the destruction became more organised as Chinese and Tibetan Party workers moved from one commune to the next, mobilising the local people to destroy all religious landmarks in their vicinity.¹³

Though the number of functioning monasteries had already been catastrophically reduced since 1959, most of the buildings and their precious contents had survived. Now they were to be destroyed. Rather than being a spontaneous frenzy of destruction, this was a carefully planned operation. Before people were sent to destroy temples and monasteries, all precious stone and metal objects were carefully labelled and prepared for transportation to Beijing. Large structures were dynamited; whatever remained was then smashed. Apart from a few sites that were saved by the personal intervention of Zhou Enlai, such as the Potala, Tashilhunpo monastery and the great printing house at Derge, everything was levelled to the ground.

Though inspired and orchestrated by Chinese Communists, most of the destruction was carried out by young Tibetan Red Guards. The question of whether these Tibetans willingly destroyed their own heritage is not easily answered. Some, such as the several thousand Tibetan Red Guards from the Tibetan Nationality Institute in Xianyang, enthusiastically participated in smashing the 'four olds'. Local Tibetans arbitrarily designated as Red Guards might have been inspired by the revolutionary rhetoric of the campaign – people throughout China later spoke of a kind of collective madness or mass hysteria sweeping the country, especially the young. But whatever one's

personal feelings, there was simply no alternative in the atmosphere of fear and coercion that had spread through Tibet since 1959, with any protests, or even hesitation in obeying the Party, likely to result in being subjected to 'struggle sessions' at the best, and imprisonment and execution at the worst. Aristocrats and lamas, many of them in old age, were paraded through the streets wearing their traditional clothes as well as dunce's caps, with signs hung round their necks detailing their crimes. Anyone who resisted the destruction of the 'four olds' would be subjected to similar humiliations.

Now every mark of Tibetan cultural distinctiveness was to be erased. In the name of replacing the old feudal culture with new scientific socialism, all expressions of Tibetan culture were banned, including clothing, songs, dances and drama. Even the bright colours decorating Tibetan houses were painted over in grey or socialist red. Chinese-style clothes of the same colours replaced traditional Tibetan clothes.¹⁴ And to make it easier to translate between Chinese and Tibetan, the Tibetan language itself was simplified, or, as Ngapo put it later, 'seriously wrecked'.¹⁵

'BOMBARD THE HEADQUARTERS'

Within a year, much of what made Tibet different from China was lost to view. In its place was the cult of Mao, whose portrait was everywhere. The great wave of iconoclasm seemed to have prepared the way for the new Chinese religion of Mao worship. Every household had to display a poster of Mao, and millions of copies of the little red book containing Tibetan translations of Mao's sayings were sent to Tibet, far more books than there were people in Tibet to read them. Unable to practise any of the old rituals, some Tibetans used copies of the books as magical talismans to ward off spirits and hailstorms.¹⁶

But the Cultural Revolution had not yet run its course. Mao, still working to destabilise the power base of the Communist Party in Beijing, had urged the Red Guards to 'bombard the headquarters' and target the Party itself. In China, rival factions of Red Guards, some attacking the local Party and others supporting it, now turned against each other. In Tibet, one of the first victims of the 'bombard the headquarters' movement was Ngapo, who had only recently returned from the National Day celebrations in Beijing. On the night of 28 October 1966, a group of Red Guards went to his house in Lhasa and shouted for Ngapo to come out. He came to speak to the students and agreed

to go with them to a mass meeting, where he was subjected to a struggle session.

Following the usual procedure of a struggle session, Ngapo had to recite a version of his own life story as raw material for criticism. Since he had brought his bodyguards along, Ngapo was not physically attacked, but he was subjected to criticism and made to agree that he had exploited the masses in the old society. The next day, when the Red Guards arrived at Ngapo's house to continue the session, he had disappeared. Zhou Enlai had been informed about the struggle session, and had sent an order for Ngapo to be flown to Beijing immediately.¹⁷

As the first groups of Chinese Red Guards arrived in Lhasa, the movement to unseat the regional Party gathered momentum.¹⁸ By early 1967, there were two factions. The revolutionary faction, called Gyenlog ('The Rebels'), attacked the Chinese generals and other Lhasa Party members as reactionaries. In order to defend themselves, the latter then united under the banner of Namdrel ('The Supporters'). These two groups had little to distinguish them in terms of their Maoist revolutionary rhetoric, and both were composed of a mixture of Chinese and Tibetan members. As both now aimed at asserting control over Tibet, they clashed in bloody battles across the country. One of the worst took place at the Jokhang temple itself, which a Gyenlog group had turned into its fortress, its barbed-wire fences serving as a defensive barrier, and loudspeakers positioned on its roof proving a useful method of publicising their cause. But they were ambushed here by Namdrel supporters, and many were killed.¹⁹

By the summer of 1968, Mao had succeeded in his main objective of overthrowing the Party chairman, Liu Shaoqi, and replacing him with his own favourite, Lin Biao. He now decided to restore some semblance of order in China. The army was sent in and various factions of Red Guards were ordered to cease fighting and come together in Revolutionary Committees formed to replace the local government bodies that they had destroyed. As for Tibet, Zhou Enlai issued an order for fighting to stop and for people to return to their ordinary work. The Tibetan Revolutionary Committee was made up of both Chinese and Tibetans, but Tibetans who had previously held government posts had been labelled as reactionaries and many were in prison. Consequently, the Tibetans now elevated to leadership posts were chosen purely on the basis of class: peasants with blameless backgrounds, most of whom were illiterate. The exception, as usual, was Ngapo, who was given a nominal place on the

Revolutionary Committee for Tibet, though he remained in Beijing, safe from the class hatred of the Red Guards in Tibet.

Now came the bloodiest phase of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, a spate of grassroots Tibetan uprisings sparked by anger at the latest wave of Communist reforms, the establishment of massive farming communes. Those peasants who had welcomed being freed from their old aristocratic masters found their lives even more circumscribed in the communes, and began to rebel. They continued to see themselves as belonging to the Gyenlog faction of the Red Guards (whose local Chinese leaders had directly encouraged them at first to start their attacks) and their main targets were the established Party officials of the Namdrel faction. At least one of the uprisings did manifest itself as a reassertion of Tibetan culture, though twisted as if in a nightmare. It happened in the Nyemo region, and was led by a young nun called Trinle Chodron who claimed to be possessed by a figure from the epic story of the warrior-king Gesar. The nun praised Mao as an emanation of Manjushri, claiming that his responsibility was for the material life of Tibet while her responsibility was its religious life. She also claimed to be receiving messages from the Dalai Lama spoken by a bird. As the movement gained momentum, she and her followers began to talk about freeing Tibet from the Chinese.

The nun's followers attacked with extreme violence, torturing and dismembering anyone they identified as belonging to the Namdrel faction. They also adopted some of the sadistic practices of the Chinese Red Guards, such as making people dig the pits in which they were to be buried. Prophecies of a resurgence of Tibetan Buddhism spilled from Trinle Chodron's lips and rumours spread that she could not be killed by bullets. Soon there were similar uprisings in other parts of Tibet and the PLA was sent in to quell them. Despite fighting from the hills, Trinle Chodron and her followers were captured in the summer of 1969, brought to Lhasa and publicly executed. This marked the end of the most chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution, though its policies would continue until the death of Mao in 1976, and the psychological scars would remain for much longer. The damage done to the cultural landscape of Tibet was irreversible.²⁰

By the 1970s, Mao was an emperor-like figure whom no one dared oppose. Having restored order in China, he used his new authority to perform an astonishing volte-face. Mao instigated a minor war with the Soviet Union over a disputed river island on the Siberian frontier, which provoked the Kremlin into a massive build-up of forces in Mongolia. At the same time Mao

instructed Zhao Enlai to begin to explore links with China's great enemy, the USA, whose new president, Richard Milhouse Nixon, was known to be interested in a rapprochement with Beijing. In 1971, China was visited first by the US table-tennis team, and then secretly by Henry Kissinger.

Then, in 1972, Nixon himself came to Beijing and was received by Mao in his study. Mao was so ill he could barely stand or speak, but he held Nixon's hand for more than a minute and they were photographed together to show China and the world that the global balance of power had changed. China would now stand by the USA against their common enemy, the Soviet Union. For Tibet, the result of this 'normalisation' of relations between the USA and China was that any remaining CIA support for the Tibetan rebels was cut off. Things had changed in Nepal as well: the new king, Birendra, was courting China for economic aid and so demanded that all Khampas leave Nepal. Some did, especially after the Dalai Lama sent taped messages telling them to go. Then, in 1974, the Nepalese army attacked and killed the remaining Khampas in Mustang.²¹

Soon others, including the British prime minister Edward Heath, followed Nixon to China. This was indeed a new world, and China would gradually grow to be an indispensable economic partner to many nations. But in this world there was no place for Tibetan calls for support, let alone independence. Tibet was for a while forgotten, its people clad in the dull colours of Communist China, banned from practising their religion or expressing their cultural difference from China. Yet as the destruction and repression of the 1960s led even more Tibetans to flee into exile, the Tibetan diaspora became a worldwide phenomenon. Tibetan Buddhism, almost wiped out in Tibet, was starting to thrive in new places.

CAST ADRIFT

Monastery heads who fled Tibet in the years after 1959 lost their past. More than that, they lost their future too. Most of them had been recognised as tulkus, or reincarnate lamas, at an early age, which meant that they had entered a massive support system, been housed in monasteries and taught by scholar monks. Early in childhood they came to know what was expected of them: to teach the dharma, to be a part of their monastery's ritual life and to support the monastery financially through receiving religious offerings. Thus, having lost first their monasteries, and then Tibet itself, the lamas were now cast adrift.

Some remembered what Khenpo Kangshar had said in the 1950s – that the Tibetans had lost their monasteries and their rituals, and would now have nothing to rely on except their own personal practice of the Buddha's teachings. But others began to look at ways to rebuild what had been lost, and it seemed that this might just be possible. The king of Sikkim promised to support the Karmapa and plans were begun for a new monastery. The royal family of Bhutan opened the doors of its reclusive kingdom to lamas such as the renowned Nyingma meditator Dilgo Khyentse, though at first he had to support himself by working as a schoolteacher.

Most of the Gelug monks of Lhasa's three great monasteries were relocated to a refugee camp in Buxa Duar, a hot and humid jungle location in Bengal, as different in climate from Tibet as it could possibly be. Many fell ill and died of diseases such as tuberculosis, but others continued to teach, attend classes, practise debate and perform rituals, making their own virtual monasteries within the refugee camp. The scholars whose educational careers had been cut short continued to study for their degrees. Some luckier monks were given roles by the Dalai Lama in the new Tibetan government. As the Dalai Lama struggled to cope with the increasing number of refugee children, lamas were called in to draw up curricula, prepare textbooks and work as teachers. For those tulkus who were still only small children, the Dalai Lama also established a School for Young Lamas.

The first attempt to bring the leading exiled lamas together was the Tibetan Buddhist Conference convened by the Dalai Lama in 1963. Fitting the multifarious world of Tibetan Buddhism into the structure of a Western-style conference proved a little tricky. Each school needed to appoint a head to represent it: not an easy task. The head of the Gelug school was not, in fact, the Dalai Lama but the throne-holder of Ganden monastery. There was a dispute between the two leading houses of Sakya as to who would head the school, but one house prevailed and the young Sakya Trizin came to represent his school at the conference. The Kagyu school was not really a single school at all, though most of the smaller Kagyu sects deferred to the authority of the Karmapa, and it was he who came to the conference to represent them all. As for Nyingma, this was not so much a school as a loose conglomeration of monasteries and lay tantric lamas, or Ngagpas, who had never accepted a single lama as their leader. But, recognising the need for one in these new times, they appointed Dudjom Lingpa, an accomplished scholar and tertön who was currently working in Dharamsala on a new series of textbooks for

Tibetan schoolchildren. The Bonpo school was not included in the conference and remained marginalised until the late 1970s, when the Dalai Lama officially acknowledged it as one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

At the conference all of the lamas agreed on the need to establish their tradition in exile and left newly determined to do so. For centuries the Karma Kagyu had been the second most powerful school in Tibet, and the Karmapa soon established a new monastic and administrative centre in Sikkim. The royal family of Sikkim had been patrons of the Karma Kagyu school for centuries, and back in the sixteenth century a Karmapa had built a monastery in the village of Rumtek. Though it was now just a ruin, the Karmapa decided to re-establish his school here. In a personal meeting with Nehru, he secured the funding to rebuild the monastery, which was finished in 1966. Just as many Tibetan aristocrats had moved their wealth across the border to Sikkim when the Chinese arrived in Lhasa, so the Karmapa had been moving the most treasured possessions of Tsurpu – the seat of the Karmapas in Tibet – to Sikkim, and these were now housed in the new monastery.²²

The young Sakya Trizin had fewer wealthy patrons, and his new monastery in the hill station of Rajpur, Dehradun, grew slowly. But in time the full curriculum that had made the Sakya school famous for its scholars was being studied there. The Nyingma remained true to their pluralistic nature with different lamas establishing themselves in scattered monasteries. Dudjom seemed to feel no need to establish a headquarters for the whole of his school, and set up relatively small monasteries. One of these was in Kathmandu, which was becoming increasingly popular as a site for the construction of Tibetan exile monasteries, especially around the ancient stupa of Bodhanath, which had been a pilgrimage destination for Tibetan Buddhists for centuries.

Some of the newly exiled lamas – especially those who found that they lacked the patronage to establish their own monastic centres – considered their limited options and took a step into the unknown. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the world of academia provided the first point of contact between Westerners and the lamas who had graduated from Tibet's own rigorous educational system – like the West's university system in some ways, though very different in others. A handful of European and American academics had devoted themselves to the study of Tibet (the awkwardly named new field of 'Tibetology'). For them, the sudden presence of hundreds of Tibetan monks in India, including many of the most educated and renowned lamas, presented an exciting opportunity.

While travelling in Nepal in 1960, David Snellgrove, an English scholar of the Bon religion, met a lama in Nepal who turned out to be the exile abbot of Menri, Tibet's most significant Bon monastery. Soon, with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the abbot and two other eminent Bonpo scholars were on their way to London to study and teach at the School of Oriental and African Studies. One of them, Samten Karmay, went on to complete a PhD and became a leading Tibetologist in his own right. Also in 1960, the Italian explorer and scholar Giuseppe Tucci invited the Nyingma lama Namkhai Norbu to the Oriental Institute in Naples. Within a few years, Namkhai Norbu was a professor. One of the great centres of Tibetology at the time was in Paris, and soon a leading scholar of Drepung monastery accepted an invitation to teach Tibetan language and history at the Sorbonne, a post he was to hold for almost thirty years.

At the same time in America, two scholars of Tibet, Turrell Wylie and Robert Ekvall, managed to get the funds together to invite a group of Sakya lamas to Seattle. This group included the entire family of one of the ruling houses of Sakya, along with their children's tutor, the eminent scholar Dezhung Rinpoche. It was Wylie's plan to ask Dezhung for the tantric initiation into the cycle of Hevajra, which he was studying at the time. To Wylie's chagrin, Dezhung refused outright. He was sure that Wylie was not genuinely interested in practising Buddhism. In a letter to a Tibetan friend in India, Dezhung described how these Western academics were only interested in amassing enough information to publish a big book with the ambition that people would say of them, 'The great scholar so-and-so wrote this book'. In America, he wrote disconsolately, there was no chance of living the life of a Tibetan lama: giving initiations, receiving offerings, and establishing centres for teaching and practice. But this was about to change.²³

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

In 1933, a young Englishman from the London suburb of Walthamstow published a novel about a mythical valley called Shangri-La. James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* was an adventure story about a group of Westerners who stumble across the hidden valley when their plane crash-lands in the Himalayas. The people they find in Shangri-La are happy and peaceful, and their leader, the High Lama, is a being of great spiritual advancement (though he turns out not to be a Tibetan, but a Catholic monk from Luxembourg). The book wove

together Western fantasies about Tibet of the kind conjured up by the Theosophist Madame Blavatsky with the tales of derring-do published by Francis Younghusband and other travellers in Tibet.

The idea of a perfect land from which we are exiled had precedents, of course, not least the Garden of Eden itself. In England, there was Samuel Johnson's Happy Valley in the eighteenth century, and A.E. Housman's Edwardian nostalgia for 'the land of lost content'. But with the success of the novel *Lost Horizon*, soon followed by a hit Hollywood movie directed by Frank Capra, this potent symbol got a new name and became inextricably linked with the image of Tibet. Another factor in the growing popularity of Tibet in the West was the hippie counterculture. In the search for alternatives to the conventional lifestyle, 'Eastern philosophy' and meditation proved almost as interesting as drugs and music. Tibetan Buddhism, with its colourful mandalas, cosmic deities and even a psychedelic connection through Timothy Leary's acid-trip interpretation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, convinced some that the Tibetans were hippies from an older time. The Shangri-La myth had taken a new twist.

Most of the Tibetans who had come to the West were puzzled by this development, which seemed to have little connection with their own understanding of their religion. One such was Geshe Wangyal, a Kalmyk disciple of Dorjiev who had trained in Tibet before fleeing the Soviet Union for America in 1951. Speaking to one of his students, the long-haired and exotically attired Robert Thurman, he asked. 'How can you travel the path of the Dharma? You can't even travel on a bus without everybody freaking out.' He encouraged Thurman to straighten up, learn to read Tibetan and study at university, which Thurman eventually did, becoming a professor at Columbia.²⁴

Yet some of the younger lamas saw something in the hippie movement that might present a new opportunity for Tibetan Buddhism. In 1963, a young tulku called Chogyam Trungpa from the School for Young Lamas in northern India travelled by steamboat to England, to study at Oxford University. Having successfully obtained a degree in Comparative Religion, he and another Kagyu lama who had accompanied him to England, Akong Tulku, founded the first Tibetan Buddhist centre in Britain, Samye Ling, named after Tibet's first monastery. But the two Tibetan lamas had quite different ideas about how to teach Buddhism to Westerners: Akong wanted to establish something akin to a Tibetan monastery, while Trungpa was becoming increasingly convinced that this was not the way forward.

Though still a monk, Trungpa had fathered a child with a nun who had escaped from Tibet with him, and he had continued to be sexually active in England. He was also drinking, and in 1969 he drove his car off the road and crashed it into a joke shop. The accident left him partially paralysed, and convinced him that the time had come to renounce his monk's robes and any pretence to a traditional Tibetan way of life. The following year he married a sixteen-year-old English girl and together they travelled to America. Trungpa had been a moderately successful teacher of meditation in Britain but in America he was a big hit. Some of his students established America's first Buddhist centre in rural Vermont. Trungpa's teaching style became increasingly informal, and the words he used to present Buddhism were drawn from the language of his young disciples, incorporating a popular version of Freudian psychology. New Buddhist centres sprang up wherever he taught, in Boulder, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and on and on.

Almost by accident, Trungpa was discovering the means by which Tibetan Buddhism would establish itself in the West – not through monasteries but through lay organisations based in small centres where people would gather to hear Buddhist teachings and practise meditation. As he came to understand the hippie movement better, he criticised the 'spiritual supermarket' mentality that he saw in many Americans who came to hear him talk. In an influential book called *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism*, he voiced his fear that Buddhism was becoming just an ornament among other exotic spiritual traditions. But even as Trungpa urged his students to give up their long hair and hippie attire and become more serious in their approach, his own behaviour continued to be extreme, and controversial.

As the counterculture movement drew to a close and more Tibetan lamas came to the West, many American Buddhists turned to those lamas teaching in a more traditional style. Even Dezhung Rinpoche, who had despaired of living the life of a lama in the West, now had a small group of loyal American students. Something new, which combined Trungpa's flexibility with the traditional structure of Samye Ling, was gradually developing. Without the support structure of major monasteries, few Westerners became monks, and most of those who did gave back their robes after a few years. But Tibet provided another model, that of the lay practitioner of tantric Buddhism, and soon hundreds of these students were embarking on the arduous course of tantric preliminary practices, beginning with a hundred thousand full-length prostrations.

With the sprouting of centres for these lay practitioners across Europe and America, a fairly solid basis for Tibetan Buddhism was now in place, something that had hardly seemed possible a decade earlier. Some Western students were surprised by how little the lamas worked together: they each seemed to want to establish their own network of Buddhist centres, and sometimes seemed to be in competition with each other. In fact, this behaviour was a reflection of the old system in Tibet, when each tulku was responsible for his own monastery, with its own community of monks and lay patrons. It was no coincidence that it was lamas from smaller monasteries, and usually not from the Dalai Lama's own Gelug school, who first made the trip to the West in search of new opportunities.

But soon, as a Tibetan Buddhist infrastructure grew in the West, the highest-ranking Tibetan lamas began to receive invitations to teach there. The first to come was Dudjom Rinpoche, who visited the budding Nyingma centres of New York and California. Then, in 1973, the Dalai Lama made his first trip to Europe, meeting the pope before travelling on to be hosted by Buddhists in England and other European countries (the USA denied him a visa). He lightly swatted away the journalists' political questions, telling them that his trip was religious, not political, and assuring them of his great respect for Chairman Mao.²⁵

Perhaps nobody was aware of it at the time, but this was the beginning of a new stage in the Dalai Lama's campaign for Tibet. He was now able to travel as a religious teacher, to impress Westerners with his humour and equanimity. At the same time as spreading the teachings of the Buddha he was thus able to bring the issue of Tibet to the forefront of public consciousness, even if he did not express it directly. Just as President Nixon was negotiating away the last bit of foreign support for Tibetan independence, the Dalai Lama was nurturing the first shoots of the unofficial support for his position that would soon turn opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet into a cause of which few Westerners could remain unaware.

The same year that the Dalai Lama visited Europe for the first time, a second movie version of *Lost Horizon* was released, and promptly flopped. It was a terrible film, to be sure, but the world had also moved on since the 1930s, when James Hilton's novel and the first cinematic version appeared. The Tibetans were no longer the passive subjects of Western projections. They had rebuilt their major monasteries in India, and travelled far to teach their religion and tell their stories. The great Himalayan masters who had populated Madame

Blavatsky's eccentric fantasies were now to be found teaching in village halls and living rooms. Tibetan Buddhism had shown, once again, its remarkable facility for being enthusiastically received by other cultures.

ANYTHING BUT INDEPENDENCE

On 9 September 1976, Mao Zedong, the self-styled 'Great Helmsman' who had steered China on an increasingly eccentric and destructive course, died, and suddenly the balance of power in China shifted. Mao's widow, one of the leading lights of the Cultural Revolution, was arrested as one of the 'Gang of Four' who were to receive the blame for the violence and destruction of the last decade. Deng Xiaoping, the old economic realist who had been ousted during the Cultural Revolution, came to the fore again and replaced Mao's chosen successor with his own ally, the liberal Hu Yaobang. As the Communist Party moved swiftly to distance itself from the events of the last decade, a new era began in which the policies of Maoism were rejected in favour of economic liberalisation.

After a while these changes in Beijing begin to filter through to Tibet. Deng had been around during the first phase of the Communist takeover there, and had been a strong advocate of the gradualist approach that had prevailed until 1959 (though he preferred to forget his role in the vicious 'anti-Rightist campaign' of 1957–58). Soon after assuming the leadership of China, he began to explore ways of rebuilding links with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile community. Contact was made with Gyalo Thondup, the brother of the Dalai Lama, who after the collapse of the Khampa rebel movement had moved to Hong Kong where he now worked as a businessman. Gyalo flew to Beijing to meet Deng, and the two talked about the prospects of getting the Dalai Lama to visit Beijing for talks. Everything was up for discussion, Deng said, except independence.

As a gesture of good will, political prisoners were released, including those who had taken part in the 1959 uprising, and survived the subsequent years of imprisonment and forced labour. The Panchen Lama was also freed from house arrest to make his first official statement in many years, a call for the Dalai Lama to visit Tibet. The Dalai Lama was cautious, asking whether fact-finding missions from Dharamsala might first visit Tibet to see what the conditions were like. Deng immediately said yes, and plans got under way to send representatives of the Dalai Lama back to Tibet for the first time since the

mass flight into exile. The Dalai Lama and his government in exile tried to keep these developments secret, knowing that some Tibetans would be angered by this apparent rapprochement with the Communists. Indeed, when news of Gyalo Thondup's visit to China got out, many Tibetans complained that he was up to his old tricks.²⁶

The first fact-finding mission was headed by Lobsang Samten, another of the Dalai Lama's brothers, who was also a tulku. Though a monk when he left Tibet, Lobsang had disrobed and married, living for a while in America where he worked as a school janitor. Though his erratic progress had angered the Dalai lama at the time, the two were now reconciled and Lobsang was seen as a reliable representative. Entering Amdo, the Tibetan delegation made its first stop at the village of Tashikil, where hundreds of Tibetans quickly surrounded their vehicles. The Chinese escorts warned the Tibetan delegation not to get out, as the people were angry with them and would try to kill them.

In fact, the Tibetans were clamouring for news of the Dalai Lama and desperately trying to see, or touch, his revered brother Lobsang. Wherever the delegation went in Amdo these scenes were repeated, with Tibetans rushing to reach the Dalai Lama's delegation, then breaking down and weeping in front of them. It was becoming clear that the ideological transformation of the Tibetans had failed. The Party authorities in Lhasa now feared a mass disturbance when the Dalai Lama's representatives arrived, but they were unable to admit that the disturbances in Amdo came out of devotion to the Dalai Lama. Instead they held neighbourhood meetings in which the Tibetans were advised not to show their hatred of their old feudal masters by throwing stones or spitting at the delegates.

The welcome given to the Tibetan delegation in Lhasa was even more ecstatic. Thousands of Tibetans came to greet the visitors, and throughout the visit the streets of Lhasa were full of people hoping to catch a glimpse of them. During a guided tour of the Norbulingka the crowds, chanting 'Long live the Dalai Lama', overwhelmed the Chinese security officers. Lobsang walked among them for five hours, and one person after another poured out their griefs and sorrows to him. Some tried to tear off strips of his clothing; others pressed gifts upon him, Buddhist paintings and statues that they had kept hidden for years. There was dancing and the sound of long-banned Tibetan traditional songs. There were even shouts of 'Tibet is independent!' and 'Go home, Chinese!' As one Party member remarked bitterly to another, 'The efforts of the last twenty years have been undone in a single day!'²⁷

As the tour continued into other parts of Tibet it became clear to the Tibetan delegation that behind the Chinese assertions of socialist progress in Tibet lay economic deprivation, personal tragedy, and the destruction of Tibet's religion and culture. The visit cast Lobsang into a long depression from which he never really recovered. And it became clear to the Chinese government that twenty years of indoctrination had failed to extinguish the Tibetan people's attachment to their own religion, and their reverence for the Dalai Lama. It sacked the leading Party members in Lhasa, who it felt had misled it about the situation on the ground, and in the spring of 1980 Hu Yaobang (now Party secretary) made his own fact-finding visit to Tibet.

Dismayed by what he saw, Hu wrote a damning report, pointing out that living conditions in Tibet lagged far behind those in any other part of China. 'We have worked for thirty years, but the life of the Tibetan people has not notably improved,' he wrote, concluding: 'are we not to blame?' Hu stressed the need for genuine autonomy, and for supporting Tibetan culture and education, writing that 'the world renowned ancient Tibetan culture included fine Buddhism, graceful music and dance, as well as medicine and opera.' He also stated that the government in Tibet should be at least two-thirds composed of Tibetan Party members and that all Chinese Party members working in Tibet should learn Tibetan.²⁸

These were not mere words, and soon all kinds of restrictions began to be lifted. It became clear that the cultureless uniformity imposed on Tibet had only been skin-deep, masking a strong ongoing sense of Tibetan identity and culture. As exiled Tibetans were given visas to visit Tibet again, the lamas who had become well-off through their new Western patrons returned to rebuild their old ruined monasteries. Monks began to put their robes back on, and a few tentatively returned to monasteries such as Drepung: within a few years, they were studying Buddhist philosophy again and gathering in the prayer hall to chant together.²⁹

In Beijing, Ngapo, who had kept his head down since escaping the purges of the Cultural Revolution, began to take part in public life once more. In 1981, he wrote an introduction to Tibet for a European book. While he avoided criticising the Chinese Communist Party, he emphasised that Tibet was culturally unique and quite different from China, and he wrote of the 'wanton and irreparable damage' that had been done to Tibet's cultural heritage during the Cultural Revolution. Ngapo also started a campaign to teach the Tibetan language, rejecting the simplified form that had been introduced in the 1960s.

At the same time the Panchen Lama was able to voice criticism of the persecution of Buddhists in Tibet and make plans for its restitution. Working together with Ngapo, he set up the Tibet Aid Development Foundation, a charity for raising the living standards of ordinary Tibetans.³⁰

As for the Dalai Lama, Hu felt that enticing him to come and live in Beijing would stop him becoming a rallying point for the Tibetans' nationalistic feelings. With this in mind, talks began between Beijing and Dharamsala in 1982. They were, it seems, doomed from the start. The Chinese were unwilling to offer more than limited cultural autonomy to the Tibetans, while the Tibetan position was essentially that set out in the 1914 Simla Agreement – political autonomy not only for the Tibetan Autonomous Region, but for Kham and Amdo, too. These areas would become a demilitarised zone, and China could handle its external affairs.

Among the exiles there were many who felt that anything less than independence would be a capitulation; the Dalai Lama's brother Thubten Norbu was the most vocal of these. Many Khampa exiles felt that they were the only ones who had put up a fight and that the Dalai Lama's government had failed to protect Tibet. And a younger generation of Tibetans were questioning their elders, asking why the Communists had been able to enter Tibet so easily in the 1950s. A group of these young Tibetans, educated in India and the West, set up the Tibetan Youth Congress, which swore loyalty to the Dalai Lama but questioned the policies of his government in exile and spoke out in favour of Tibetan independence.

So even if the Dalai Lama had agreed to all of the terms set by Beijing, he would not have been able to bring all of the exile Tibetans along with him. Some, in fact, would have regarded it as the deepest kind of betrayal, and the exile community would have been split forever. It was, therefore, not surprising that negotiations that began with such hope ended in failure. And then, suddenly, there was another of those switchbacks that characterise the Chinese Communist Party. Before Hu Yaobang could complete all of the reforms of which he had spoken, Deng turned against him and forced him to resign from his position as Party secretary in January 1987. Fearful of increasing criticism from pro-democracy students in China, Deng and his Party had decided to take a more repressive stance.³¹

Seeing the hope of reaching an accord with the Chinese fade away, the Dalai Lama now turned to the West in a concerted campaign to gain the support of Europe and the USA. In September 1987, he travelled to America to make his first political speech there. On 21 September, before the Congressional Human

Rights Caucus in Washington, DC, he argued that Tibet was independent when China invaded, that the latter's continued colonial administration of Tibet was an illegal occupation and that the human rights abuses in Tibet amounted to a 'holocaust'. He put forward the proposal that the Chinese had already rejected, that Tibet should be an autonomous demilitarised zone (or, as he now called it, 'a zone of peace'). The speech was sympathetically received, the result being an amendment to the Foreign Relations Act stating that the USA would make the treatment of the Tibetan people an important factor in its relationship with China. Though this declaration of US support for the Dalai Lama's position was only a 'Sense of Congress' resolution without the force of law, it was still a massive boost to the morale of the Tibetan exiles.

When news reached Tibet via the Chinese-language broadcasts of the BBC and the Voice of America, the effect was immediate. Party officials in Lhasa began an anti-Dalai Lama campaign, bearing down on suspected dissidents. At the same time, small protests were staged by the monks of Drepung monastery, mostly from the elite group training for the Geshe degree; these protestors were also committed to ideas of democracy and human rights that they had read about in documents that had leaked from India. On 1 October, about thirty monks were beaten in the streets, arrested and taken into custody. Ordinary Tibetans gathered outside the police station and demanded that they be released. This protest turned into a riot during which the police station and vehicles were set on fire; protestors were killed when the police shot into the crowds. The events were witnessed by tourists and covered by journalists, and soon the whole world knew what had happened. To some in the Communist Party, it appeared that the liberal policies of Hu Yaobang had led to an outbreak of Tibetan nationalism. Repressive measures were brought in, and show trials in which demonstrators were convicted became a frequent occurrence. Yet the demonstrations continued: there were some two hundred of them over the next six years. It was a sign of just how strong the anti-government feeling had become in Tibet that monks, nuns and other Tibetans were now willing to risk imprisonment and torture in order to express their support for the Dalai Lama.

Spurred on to show some kind of willingness to negotiate, Deng announced that the Dalai Lama could return to live in Tibet if he publicly gave up the idea of Tibetan independence. In response, the Dalai Lama made another political speech – this time before the European Parliament in Strasbourg – of his vision for a unified and autonomous Tibet. This was, once again, rejected by the Chinese government as representing an indirect form of independence,

and the door to a negotiated settlement between Beijing and the Dalai Lama swung closed again. Still the demonstrations in Lhasa continued. On 5 March 1989, as the thirtieth anniversary of the 1959 uprising approached, there was another riot, and this time martial law was declared in Tibet.³²

Then, a month later, Hu Yaobang, the deposed reformer, died and pro-democracy students gathered to protest in Tiananmen Square. The scale of this demonstration shook the Communist Party to its core. The subsequent repression of the protests, with the deaths of many Chinese students, shocked the world, and left the international image of the Party deeply damaged. One expression of the turning of the international mood against China was the announcement that the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize had been awarded to the Dalai Lama. Accepting the prize, the Dalai Lama reached far back into Tibet's past for a statement summarising his vision for Tibet and China:

Any relationship between Tibet and China will have to be based on the principles of equality, respect, trust and mutual benefit. It will also have to be based on the principle which the wise rulers of Tibet and China laid down in a treaty as early as 823 A.D., carved on the pillar which still stands today in front of the Jokhang, Tibet's holiest shrine, in Lhasa, that 'Tibetans will live happily in the great land of Tibet, and the Chinese will live happily in the great land of China.'³³

Once again, Tibet's history was brought to the fore, this time with a reference to the treaty pillar in Lhasa, previously known only to a handful of scholars. The Dalai Lama had put forward his argument for Tibet's distinctness from China again, this time to a vast audience – but in terms that the Chinese would see as a veiled reference to independence despite his claims to be seeking only autonomy. With China shaken, the Tibetans rising in protest and the Dalai Lama's cause gaining huge international support, many Tibetans felt that change was now sure to come.

STRUGGLE

The tenth Panchen Lama had come a long way since the days when, as a skinny teenager in ceremonial silk robes, he had sat beside Mao during state banquets. He was a heavy-set middle-aged man and had given back his monastic robes when he had finally been freed from prison. After his release he had toed the

Party line, but was rumoured to be unhappy and to have become a heavy drinker. Then, in the 1980s, he married a Chinese woman and began to play an active role in public life again, renewing his old working relationship with Ngapo in an effort to revive Tibetan culture. Early in 1989, he made a special trip back to his monastery of Tashilhunpo, to reinter the remains of the previous Panchen Lamas. These were to be housed in a new stupa funded mainly by the Chinese government, the largest and most expensive to be built in Tibet in the last fifty years. The stupa was inaugurated in a ceremony attended by the great and the good, including Hu Jintao, the new leader of the Communist Party in Tibet. It was both a cherished dream of the Panchen Lama's and a chance for the Party to show its support for religion in Tibet.

Then, during the celebrations that followed, suddenly and unexpectedly, the Panchen Lama died. Though there was, on the face of it, little reason to doubt the official story that he had succumbed to a heart attack, rumours were soon flying around that he had been poisoned. Yet it seems unlikely that the Communist Party would want to murder an ally who, while he could be critical in private meetings, publicly supported its position. In fact, the Panchen Lama's death was a blow for the Chinese, coming at a time when things were not going well in Tibet. He was a much-needed bridge between the Chinese Communists and Tibet's Buddhists. Tibetan devotion to the Dalai Lama had proved surprisingly resilient, but the Panchen Lama was still the second highest-ranking lama in Tibet.³⁴

Both Beijing and the Dalai Lama knew that the way the next Panchen Lama was selected would have immense symbolic meaning. Since the eighteenth century China had cultivated the Panchen Lamas as a counterweight to the authority of the Dalai Lamas, and the Party had no intention of letting the Dalai Lama reassert his authority now. Knowing well that the tenth Panchen Lama had been selected with the approval of the Party and only ratified by the Dalai Lama under duress, this time it wanted to keep the Dalai Lama out of the process entirely. However, the abbots of Tashilhunpo complained that the selection of the Panchen Lamas had always been ratified by the Dalai Lama. Ngapo suggested that the Dalai Lama should at least be consulted, and the Party grudgingly agreed, allowing the Tashilhunpo abbots to contact the Dalai Lama via his brother Gyalo Thondhup.³⁵

Over the next few months the abbots of Tashilhunpo carried out their search, while keeping the Dalai Lama informed of their progress. Then, in

September 1993, the Dalai Lama announced that relations with China had once again broken down. By the following year it was clear that the Party had taken another of its swings towards authoritarianism in Tibet, when the Third Forum on Work in Tibet resulted in the most repressive legislation against Buddhist monks and nuns since the Cultural Revolution. The forum's report stated that the Tibetan independence movement was a serpent whose head, the 'Dalai clique', must be cut off. It went on to say that the monasteries were the weak point at which the Dalai clique could infiltrate China. So from now on they would be much more closely regulated, and the number of monks and nuns restricted. Those that remained would have to attend regular 'patriotic education' sessions.³⁶

In this atmosphere it is hardly surprising that the Party took over the selection of the Panchen Lama. By 1995, it seemed that the head of the original search committee was under house arrest, and the Party officials in Lhasa had decided to appoint their own candidate. Then, to the astonishment of the Party, the Dalai Lama publicly announced the selection of the Panchen Lama. The Party was wrongfooted and infuriated by this statement, which implied that the Dalai Lama was in charge of the process. It was not so much the identity of the chosen boy as the fact that the Dalai Lama had made the selection that caused the irritation. The boy who had been selected was taken away, perhaps to Beijing, never to be heard of again. A few months later officials from China and Tashilhunpo held a ceremony in Lhasa in which lots were drawn from a golden urn (that one that the Qianlong Emperor had insisted should be used to select the Dalai and Panchen Lamas) and another boy was named as the eleventh Panchen Lama.³⁷

Now Tibetans in China were subjected to a new wave of *ad hominem* attacks on the Dalai Lama, along with demands that they express their support for the Party's choice of Panchen Lama. Many, especially the monks and nuns, thus became even further estranged from the Party. Another major shift in Tibet was the encouragement of immigration, assisted by changes in policy such as the removal of checkpoints from roads entering the Tibetan Autonomous Region. More and more ethnic Chinese came to Lhasa to set up businesses and, though many left again after a few years, this 'floating population' became a major part of Lhasa. The success of the Chinese immigrants was helped by a new law stating that licences for tour guides and certain other professions would only be given on completion of an exam – in Chinese. Soon many of the businesses and most of the shops in Lhasa, and increasingly in other Tibetan

towns as well, were run by Chinese. Tibetan exiles complained that this was a final attempt by the Chinese government to drown Tibetan nationalism by changing the ethnic make-up of Tibet. This may have been an overstatement, but, for Tibetans inside Tibet, the greater economic prosperity of the Chinese immigrants generated a simmering resentment and hostility.

Recognising that Tibet and other areas in western China had been left behind in China's economic boom, in 1999 the Chinese premier, Jiang Zemin, announced a massive investment of resources called *Xibu Da Kaifa*, 'Open Up the West'. That same year, teams of geologists were sent to Tibet to work on secret projects assessing the extent of the region's natural resources. The following year, the beginning of the new millennium saw the re-emergence of one of Mao's old dreams: the construction of a high-speed rail link to Lhasa. This incredible feat of engineering, crossing the shifting permafrost of the Changtang plateau, was adopted by the Party as one of its chief priorities. The construction of the railway was rushed forward and completed ahead of schedule in 2006, far more quickly than international observers had thought possible. The railway made access to Tibet, and its natural resources, much easier. For some, this is not a good thing. The sweeping grasslands of the Changtang plateau are already drying up and turning to desert. This is a serious threat to the livelihood of Tibet's farmers and nomads, and is also linked to wider climate change. Another recent development, the shockingly swift melting of the Himalayan glaciers, threatens the long-term water supply of much of Asia.³⁸

Meanwhile, support for the Dalai Lama and his cause outside China had become increasingly visible since the 1990s thanks to Hollywood movies, rock concerts and celebrity endorsements. This groundswell of popular international support manifested itself during the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, as the progress of the Olympic flame around the world presented an opportunity for protests led by foreign sympathisers as well as exile Tibetans. These were met with counter-protests by Chinese students abroad, who carried their own banners proclaiming that Tibet had always been part of China and telling foreigners to stop interfering.

Though some thought that these counter-demonstrations were organised by the Chinese government, it was clear that there was genuine anger among young Chinese about Western criticism of their country. The counter-protests were a symptom of another change in China. As socialist ideology was abandoned by the Chinese Communist Party, increasingly nationalistic sentiment had begun to take its place. The Party started cautiously promoting nationalism

as a new guiding ideology, moving away from talking about 'the people' and towards talking about 'the nation' instead. Reacting against foreign criticism of China's role and activities in Tibet, many ordinary Chinese now argued vociferously that Tibet was an integral part of China. What was once a matter of government policy was gaining massive popular support in Chinese society, especially among young Chinese. It seemed that protests by foreigners had only served to increase these nationalistic sentiments.³⁹

The emergence of the Tibetan issue as a *cause célèbre* in the West has had little effect on the world of international diplomacy. In 2008, the last bit of international recognition that Tibet was not an integral part of China was quietly shelved. Ever since the 1914 Simla Agreement, Great Britain had recognised China's role in Tibet in terms of suzerainty, meaning that it had some control over Tibet's foreign affairs and borders, but little or none over its internal affairs. This was a fair recognition of the political situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although the thirteenth Dalai Lama's determination that Tibet should be independent robbed China of even this minimal level of influence until the Communists took over in the 1950s. The British had kept faith with the agreement that they and the Tibetans had signed in 1914. But, in 2008, Britain's foreign secretary, David Miliband, announced that Britain would no longer consider China's relationship with Tibet to be defined by suzerainty, recognising instead China's sovereignty over Tibet.

It is perhaps surprising that it took so long for Britain to give up its position on Tibet. China's economic success since taking the capitalist route in the 1980s has made it an indispensable trading partner, while the Chinese government's angry response to criticism of its internal affairs has made foreign politicians wary of discussing Tibet. Western leaders travelling to Beijing have usually made assurances to their countries that they would talk about Tibet, but this has almost always been limited to human rights issues and has functioned mainly as an awkward preliminary to the discussions on economic partnership that are the real substance of such visits.

WHAT IS TIBET?

In the run-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Tibet was convulsed by the largest and most widespread protests since the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959. These began with about five hundred monks from Drepung calling for the release of imprisoned colleagues and for changes to religious constraints on

their monastery. A few days later the monks of Ramoche temple marched through Lhasa, and when the police tried to stop them, Tibetan laypeople began to attack the police. As the protests turned to riots they took on an ethnic aspect, with Tibetans venting their anger on the Chinese inhabitants of Lhasa. Chinese shops were smashed up and set on fire, and as many as eighteen Chinese people died. The Communist Party deplored the violence, while refusing to make any public admission that its own policies might have contributed to it. As the police force and army moved in, protests and riots broke out in other Tibetan parts of China, in the monasteries and villages of Kham and Amdo. Most of these were peaceful, but some turned violent. The protestors called for the return of the Dalai Lama, and in some cases for independence, but there were also protests in Sichuan and Gansu by ordinary rural Tibetans, who took over Chinese government buildings and raised the Tibetan flag in place of the Chinese flag.

Some analysts say that this cycle of protest and crackdown is inevitable, given the traditional Chinese view of history. In this perspective, the great emperors were those who ruled a vast empire with the strength needed to ensure its unity and stability, while the weak emperors were those who let the empire break up by allowing power to devolve and their realm to fragment. Thus, history is a constant and regular movement between good, strong emperors ruling a united empire, and bad, weak emperors, under whose rule stability turns to chaos. This belief is powerfully evoked in the famous opening lines of the popular novel *Three Kingdoms*: 'The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus has it ever been.'⁴⁰ In this way of seeing history, every attempt in regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang to assert ethnic difference and autonomy is a harbinger of division and collapse.⁴¹

Equally, the cycle of protest in Tibet is the kind of response one would expect from a people who feel that their cultural identity is under threat and who lack other channels to vent their grievances. And Tibetans' fears for the future of their culture are not unfounded. Under Chinese rule, the secular education that the monasteries of the old order once fought against is now available to the majority of Tibetans. But promises of education in the Tibetan language have never been fully realised. After primary school there is no Tibetan-language education in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Even where it is available, since a university education requires that Tibetan students have fluent Chinese, Tibetan parents realise that a Chinese-language education provides better opportunities for their children. Many of these Tibetan

students end up attending university in mainland China. Fearing that this would mean their children losing their Tibetan identity, a number of parents have sent their children on the dangerous and illegal journey to India or Nepal, to be educated among the exile Tibetans.⁴²

Yet Tibetans – both in Tibet and in exile – are perhaps more conscious of their cultural identities than ever. Those who decide to be monks in modern Tibet are not choosing an easy option, as was the case before 1959. Most are committed to study programmes. Buddhist communities have sprung up again outside the monasteries as well. In Kham, where there is a tradition of such things, a sprawling community of dedicated Buddhist practitioners, both monks and laypeople, gathered around a charismatic teacher called Khenpo Jigme Puntsog in the 1990s. The community was focused on Buddhist teaching and practice, but its size scared the local authorities and, in 2001, after Jigme Puntsog refused to reduce the number of his students, most of the camp was destroyed and the community dispersed. It has since reconstituted itself, and other charismatic teachers have become influential as students continue to gather around them.⁴³

In other ways Tibetans have taken advantage of the easing of restrictions to explore more modern modes of expression. Novels by Tibetan authors have been published, as well as poetry and other forms of literary expression. Tibetan academics have studied and written on their own culture, largely with intellectual freedom as long as they do not challenge the Party's statements and policies. They have also begun to republish much-loved literary works such as the poems of Milarepa and the sixth Dalai Lama, and the classics of Tibetan Buddhist history. These Tibetans are negotiating a space for themselves within modern China, exploring how far they can express and extend their Tibetan cultural identities within their Chinese national identity.⁴⁴

Inevitably, the internet has also created a new space in which those Tibetans who have access to it can communicate with one another across vast geographical distances, creating a virtual Greater Tibet. These internet forums allow for the expression of a self-conscious shared identity among young Tibetans, though because the Tibetan language and script have only now begun to be implemented on the internet, this is often done using a mixture of Chinese language and Tibetan words transliterated into Chinese. Despite the attempts at state control of the internet, and the frequent suppression of internet forums, these discussions continue to pop up in different places.⁴⁵ As well as allowing a process of self-definition in a wider Tibetan community, such

forums allow Tibetans to communicate to the world, albeit behind a cloak of anonymity, about what it means to be a Tibetan in modern China. That question is addressed again and again, in films, songs, essays and poems that circulate quickly and widely, even in the restricted space of the Chinese internet. This anonymous poem is typical:

I'm a Tibetan
 My skin is the colour of ancient bronze
 but
 My favourite colour is dark red
 I'm a Tibetan
 The teachings of my ancestors are engraved on my bones
 The sound of horses' hooves flows in my veins
 Fragrant barley ale fills up both my eyes
 Enchanting gesar flowers bloom on my body
 I'm a Tibetan
 Tibetan: a name which is matched by reality
 Tibetan: standing on the earth, touching the heavens
 Remember
 Don't ask me for my surname
 My surname is not Li, my surname is not Wang
 If you insist on asking for my surname
 I'll tell you I am a follower of the Buddha
 I am a strong nation blessed by the Tibetan gods
 My left shoulder is a hawk
 My right shoulder is a yak
 My body is a lamp under the statue of the Buddha, never extinguished.⁴⁶

What is striking here is the way that elements of Tibetan culture going back centuries – elements that we have seen from the first chapter of this book – are being used to strengthen a sense of identity, of distinctness from Chinese culture. And in defining what it means to be Tibetan largely in contrast to what it means to be Chinese, these writers are attempting to transcend the old regional and religious identities determined by which part of Tibet one was born in or which religious school one supported. Yet there is also room for debate about how this Tibetan cultural identity fits into the modern world. Some have argued that attachment to traditional ideas is giving the Chinese

the advantage, and that if the Tibetans are to have any hope of engaging with the Chinese as equals, they must embrace modernity. For some, independence from China is not a viable or even particularly desirable option. Others fear that, without independence, Tibet will simply disappear. What is Tibet? Surely the most important answers will be those put forward not by foreign historians or political theorists, but by Tibetans themselves.

Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. The account of the fall of Chang'an is based on the royal annals of the Tang dynasty (which comprises two works, the *Old Tang Annals* (*Jiu Tangshu*) and the *New Tang Annals* (*Xin Tangshu*). The sections on Tibet in both books have been translated into English in Bushell (1880) and Lee (1981). The French translation by Paul Pelliot (1961) is generally considered to be the most accurate. The conquest of Chang'an is also mentioned in the *Old Tibetan Annals*, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (on which see the following note) and an inscribed pillar that still stands in front of the Potala. On these Tibetan sources, see Dotson (2009: 147–49).
2. Songtsen Gampo's early life and the legends of the early tsenpos are based on the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, which survives in the manuscript Pelliot tibétain 1287. An equally important source is the year-by-year account of the Tibetan imperial government's activities, the *Old Tibetan Annals*, which survives in three manuscripts, Pelliot tibétain 1288, IOL Tib J 750 and Or.8212/187. See Dotson (2009) for a complete edition and translation of the *Annals*, as well as an authoritative overview of the Tibetan empire. An older translation of the *Annals* and *Chronicle* into French is Bacot et al. (1940). The usefulness of the *Chronicle*'s mythic stories is disputed. For a highly critical approach, see Walter (2010).
3. Because archaeological study of the Tibetan plateau is still in its infancy, there is no agreement about how long ago humans occupied the region, nor is much known about the separate waves of migration into Tibet. We do know, however, that there were many population centres in Tibet by the Neolithic era, at sites recently excavated by Chinese archaeologists. See Aldenderfer and Yinong (2004).
4. It is the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* that tells us that Songtsen's father, Namri Lontsen, was poisoned. Later sources state that a tsenpo traditionally came of age at thirteen, and that the old tsenpo was killed so that the new one could ascend to the throne, but the *Old Tibetan Annals* shows this to be untrue. See Dotson (2009: 26–27). The *Old Tibetan Annals* also suggests, in its fragmentary preamble, that Songtsen fought his younger brother Tsensong over the succession (Dotson 2009: 81).
5. This and other songs attributed to the princess, whose name is Sekarma, are in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Pelliot tibétain 1287). This song appears at ll. 408–09. For a study of this song cycle, see Uray (1972). On the role of princesses in political unions during the Tibetan empire, see Uebach (2005).

6. At the time, the Jokhang was known as the Rasa Trulnang or Tsuglagkhang. In fact, the name Jokhang is mainly used by Westerners; Tibetans today tend to call the temple the Lhasa Tsuglagkhang. The influence of Nepalese culture (especially architecture) on Tibet has been demonstrated by Roberto Vitali (1990). The *Tang Annals* records that the king of Nepal was a puppet of the Tibetans. According to later sources, Songtsen married a Nepalese princess called Bhrikuti. Some modern scholars question her existence, but a matrimonial alliance between the Nepalese and Tibetan courts is not so far-fetched.
7. Taizong was actually a posthumous name (all Chinese emperors were awarded one after their death); this emperor's real name was Li Shimin.
8. On the culture of the early Tang court and the role of foreign influences, see Schaffer (1963) and Gernet (1982).
9. Stoddard (1975: 17).
10. This version of the trials of Gar at the Chinese court is found in *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (Sørensen 1994: 219–28), written in the fourteenth century, but based on earlier sources.
11. Modern historians have noted that the *Old Tibetan Annals* suggests that the princess was intended for one of Songtsen's sons, though she seems to have become Songtsen's wife after the premature death of the son. See, for example, Beckwith (2009: 409–10) and Dotson (2009: 22–23). Since the princess was very young when she arrived in Tibet it is unlikely that she really had much influence, at least until after Songtsen's death. She was to survive him by over twenty years.
12. It is in the later Buddhist narratives that Buddhism becomes central to Songtsen Gampo's reign. A particularly influential myth from the *Mani Kambum* has Songtsen Gampo taming the Tibetan landscape, seen in the form of a supine demoness, by building thirteen Buddhist temples on her body and limbs. Modern scholars tend to attribute the Jokhang and possibly some other temples to Songtsen Gampo, while doubting the extent of his Buddhist convictions or activities apart from this.
13. This version of the legend is from *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (Sørensen 1994: 127–33).
14. This version of the story of Tonmi is one of the earliest (perhaps eleventh century), found in *The Pillar Testament*: 105.10–106.5.
15. *Pillar Testament*: 108. This scene may go back to an even earlier source, the so-called 'Narrative of Legislation and Organization' from *The Scholar's Feast*, reconstructed by Geza Uray (see Uray 1972: 23, 26).
16. Various scholarly studies of the administrative divisions of the Tibetan empire are nicely summarised in Iwao (2007). The similarity of this system to that of the Turks and Mongols was first mentioned by Giuseppe Tucci (1949: 737–38).
17. See essays in Cüppers (2004).
18. Among the many accounts of this battle, see Waddell (1911), Shakabpa (1967: 24) and Sen (2001: 14–16, 24–26). The primary source in Chinese is the *Jiu Tang shu* 196: 5222.
19. Here I disagree slightly with Haarh 1969: 405, who translates the *Old Tibetan Chronicles* (Pelliot tibétain 1287 ll. 45–48) as instructing that the tsenpo's hair should be cut, and his body lacerated. In fact, the passage can be better translated with these acts referring to the person carrying out the ritual. This also accords with practices observed in other Central Asian funerary rituals.
20. Similarities such as these have led Christopher Beckwith to write of the existence of a 'Central Eurasian culture complex'. See Beckwith (2009) and Walter (2010).
21. Haarh (1969: 406).
22. Descriptions of the tsenpo's funeral rites are found in Tucci (1950), Haarh (1969), and Snellgrove and Richardson (2004: 29–30). The funeral rites of Central or Inner Asian peoples are discussed in Baldick (2000).
23. On the census, see Dotson (2009: 46–55, 84–85).

24. *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, Pelliot tibétain 1287, ll. 501–54; quoted in Snellgrove and Richardson (2004: 61).
25. Q.835: 271a. The translation here is my own. See also Thomas (1935: 254).
26. Thomas (1935: 203 (f. 363a–b)).

CHAPTER 2

1. *Tang Annals* (Bushell 1880: 458). In fact, Jincheng's familial relationship to the emperor was more distant, but she seems to have been treated and addressed as the emperor's daughter.
2. There is a popular subgenre in Tibetan folksong in which men, playing the part of Prime Minister Gar, try to persuade the princess that the hardships she perceives in Tibet are actually natural wonders. See Ramble (2002: 72–74).
3. *Tang Annals* (Bushell 1880: 468)
4. The traditional Tibetan histories state that the princess was intended for a young heir but that, as he died before her arrival, she married the old tsenpo, Tride Tsugtsen. This is impossible given the dates of that tsenpo, who was himself a small child when the princess arrived in Lhasa. It is in fact what had happened to the previous Chinese princess, as we saw in the last chapter; the story simply seems to have been transposed to Jincheng. It is very difficult to identify either Jincheng's expected or actual spouse. Discussions of the matter can be found in Yamaguchi (1996), Kapstein (2000) and Dotson (2009).
5. Vitali 1990 argues that a political struggle resulted in the assassination of the princess.
6. The story of the refugee monks is found in a number of Tibetan texts that were probably translated from Khotanese. See Thomas (1935) and Emmerick (1967) for translations. Though most scholars have referred to the refugee monks as Khotanese, the texts actually suggest that they only briefly stayed in Khotan before moving on to Tibet. Antonello Palumbo has linked the story of the refugee monks to an edict by the emperor Xuanzong in 736 ordering the expulsion of foreign Buddhist monks from the Chinese empire. (Personal communication, March 2009.)
7. A good summary, though outdated in parts, of Tibet's non-Buddhist religious activities is Stein (1972). See also the essays collected in Karmay (1998) and, on the rituals still used today by Tibetans and other Himalayan people, see Karmay and Nagano (2000) and Ramble (2007).
8. On mountain deities and their political significance, see Karmay (1998: 413–62).
9. On Tibetan beliefs regarding the afterlife, and funeral rituals, see Haarh (1969) and Cuevas (2003).
10. On the religions of gods and men, see the essays collected in Stein (2010).
11. On this affair, see Beckwith (1983).
12. On the Tibetan alliance with the Arabs, see Beckwith (1983: 80–83).
13. Dalby (1979: 569).
14. Quotation from Bushell (1880: 514). See also Pelliot (1961: 127). The document on relative ranks at Dunhuang is Pelliot tibétain 1089 (see Scherrer-Schaub 2007). On the Sino-Tibetan Dunhuang inhabitants, see Takeuchi (1995). A letter from Central Tibet concerning an uprising at Dunhuang and the murder of the Tibetan superiors is found in the British Library manuscript IOL Tib J 1459. Digital images and catalogues of the Dunhuang manuscripts can be accessed online at the website of the International Dunhuang Project: <http://idp.bl.uk>.
15. Another treaty ceremony held shortly afterwards, in 747, turned out to be a trap sprung by the Tibetans. Though hundreds were taken prisoner, the Chinese general escaped.
16. This point is made by Dalby (1979: 610).
17. The kingdom of Nanzhou in Yunnan was under Tibetan suzerainty for much of the eighth century.
18. On depictions of Tibet in Arab sources, see T.W. Arnold et al. (eds.). 1913–38. *The Encyclopaedia of Islām: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammedan Peoples*. London: Luzac & Co., entry on Tibet.

19. See Uray (1983).
20. From IOL Tib J 1746.
21. On the conversion of the Tibetans and the role of karma and rebirth, see Kapstein (2000).
22. This story of Shantarakshita's treatment upon his arrival in Tibet is found in *The Testament of Ba (Dba' bzhed)*, and an earlier version appears in the Dunhuang fragments (see van Schaik and Iwao 2008).
23. The version of Padmasambhava's time in Tibet here is based on the earliest sources – the Dunhuang manuscripts and the *Testament of Ba*. On these, see Dalton (2004). In later literature, his role is more prominent, especially in the creation and concealment of *terma*, hidden treasures (see below, Chapter 5).
24. The Samye edict, translation by the author. See also Richardson (1985).
25. Here I use *Zen* – the familiar Japanese word. In China (where the movement began), the same character is pronounced *Chan*. This derives from the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, roughly meaning 'meditation'. The equivalent Tibetan term is *samten*.
26. This dispute and the following debate are related in the *Testament of Ba*, and in a Chinese document from Dunhuang, Pelliot chinois 4646.
27. This statement is from Kapstein (2006: 72). Note that many more tantric texts were translated later, during the 'later diffusion' of the tenth to thirteenth centuries, but the sutras and their commentaries were almost all translated during the imperial period.

CHAPTER 3

1. This succession is very confused in all the historical sources. See Dotson (2007) for the study on which the present version is based.
2. This phrase is often translated as 'uncle and nephew' but, in both Tibetan and Chinese, 'uncle' and 'father-in-law' are signified by the same word, as are 'nephew' and 'son-in-law'. The explicit reference in the Lhasa treaty pillar to the marriage of the Chinese princess certainly suggests that the father-in-law/son-in-law meanings are intended here. See Dotson 2009.
3. Note that Samten Karmay (1998: 342–43) has argued that this account of the treaty does not mean that the Tibetans practised animal sacrifices. Citing the work of R.A. Stein (1988), he argues that the Tibetans were imitating a Chinese practice 'in order to show respect to the protocol of equality and reciprocity between the two states'. However, other early sources do suggest that animal sacrifice was practised in other contexts, such as funerary rituals, in Tibet, and indeed persisted in some areas into the twentieth century (see Dalton 2011).
4. An early source for the granting of households to monasteries is the *Testament of Ba* (Pasang and Diemberger 2000: 73–75).
5. The book on the ten virtues is found in several Chinese versions in the Dunhuang manuscripts; interestingly, it was not just Tibetan versions of the text that were copied at the tsenpo's command. One of these, Or. 8210/S.3966, has a colophon mentioning that it was copied by the imperial order of the Tibetan tsenpo.
6. Ralpachen's temple-building and especially his commissioning of multiple copies of Buddhist sutras are well attested by the Dunhuang manuscripts. The Dunhuang manuscript collections contain a great many copies of the *Prajnaparamita* and *Aparamiturnama* sutras, as well as official documents concerning the copying of these sutras, one of which states that they were commissioned during the reign of Ralpachen. On the temples, see Uebach (1990). On the scriptures, see Lalou (1954, 1957).
7. See *The Scholar's Feast*, pp. 421–22. This episode is translated in Richardson (1998: 146–47).
8. The *Tang Annals* confirms this picture of Darma's character.
9. The assassination of Ralpachen is confirmed in the *Tang Annals*, but there is little that can be firmly verified in the historical accounts of Tibet from this time onwards. In what

- follows – the persecution of Buddhism under Darma, the assassination of Darma, and the flight of refugee monks to Amdo – we have only the Tibetan Buddhist histories to rely upon, all dating from the eleventh century and later.
10. The Tibetan Buddhist histories say that, after these initial measures, Darma went further, ordering all the monks to renounce their robes, forcing those who resisted to become hunters. However, given that other sources do not mention such radical persecution, it seems that this represents the situation after the death of Darma, when the kingdom began to fragment and royal support for the monasteries dried up completely. The question of whether Darma really did persecute Buddhists has been addressed in several articles: see Yamaguchi (1996), Petech (1994) and Karmay (2003). For dates and the identity of key figures, I have followed Petech (1994).
 11. A similar story is told in most traditional histories. This version follows that of Buton.
 12. There was an ensuing war between two local Tibetans which is sometimes considered the first uprising (*kenglog*) of the Tibetan fragmentation. See Petech (1994) and Davidson (2005: 67–68).
 13. Later, Palgyi Yonten is said to have been tamed by Atisha and made a local protector. Before the Cultural Revolution, the upper half of the stuffed skin of Palgyi Yonten, dressed as an oracle with a grinning black mask, was kept at a temple near Nyetang Drolma Lhakhang, where Atisha lived during the last years of his life. See Richardson (1998: 314).
 14. On the refugee monks, see Davidson (2005: chapter 3) and van Schaik and Galambos (2011: chapter 4). The story appears in most Tibetan Buddhist histories.
 15. This section tells the story of the transmission of the Vinaya in Amdo, and its return to Central Tibet, a part of most Tibetan Buddhist historical narratives. Though there is no evidence for it beyond the traditional histories, the story has almost certainly some basis in fact. However, there are many variants in the details as told by different Tibetan historians. This account is based on versions from the histories of Sonam Tsemo, Nelpa Pandita and Go Zhonupal. There is some evidence of a vibrant Buddhist community in the area from the Dunhuang manuscripts. See van Schaik and Galambos (2011).
 16. ‘Gewasel’ is actually a contraction of Gewa Rabsel. Another version of his name, equally common in Tibetan sources, is Gongpa Rabsel.
 17. The life of Gewasel is told in most Tibetan Buddhist histories. The narrative here is based on the version in the *Blue Annals*, which is one of the most detailed, though not the earliest.
 18. On the relationship between monks and politics at this time, see Iwasaki (1993).
 19. These two were Tsalana Yeshe Gyaltsen and Tride Gontsen. Later, Tsalana became a monk and a translator.
 20. Earlier sources suggest that the monks from Central Tibet did not study with Gewasel himself, but instead with one of his students, or even one of his students’ students. See van Schaik and Galambos (2011). The date of the return of the fellowship to Central Tibet, which traditionally marks the restoration of Buddhism there, is often given as 978, but some early sources give slightly different dates. In any case, it seems to have been during the 970s or 980s. See the discussion in Davidson (2005).
 21. The account of the monks’ return to Central Tibet is based on the *Religious History of Deu*, quoted in Davidson (2005: 93–95).
 22. The biography of Rinchen Zangpo is based primarily on Snellgrove and Skorupski (1977–80: II.85–116); this is a translation of a biography called *A Garland of Pearl and Crystal* (*Shel phreng lu gu rgyud*).
 23. See Karmay (1998: 3–16).
 24. Among the manuscripts from the hidden cave at Dunhuang there are hundreds of tantric texts, a testament to the popularity of tantric Buddhism even in areas where the monastic vows were still going strong. On the Mahayoga manuscripts from Dunhuang, see van Schaik (2008a, 2008b).

25. The manuscript is Pelliot tibétain 840. Though we have only one copy of this poem, its elegant language suggests that its author was familiar with the Tibetan literary tradition.
26. On Yeshe O's fusion of religion and politics, see Dalton (2011).
27. On the temples of the region, see Snellgrove and Skorupski (1977–80).
28. In 988, Yeshe O published an edict that brilliantly mixed religion with political expediency. The problem of the old Tibetan custom that a king must die before his son could take the throne was sidestepped by allowing an old king to retire gracefully into monastic life. The princely disputes over succession that had bedevilled, and ultimately destroyed, the Tibetan kingdom were to be avoided by making all princes except the heir take monastic robes. On this edict (*chos rtsigs*), see Vitali (1990: 110–11).
29. This story is from the royal chronicles of Ngari (see Vitali 1990: 115–17). The more common later story has Yeshe O being captured and ransomed. Given that the early biography of Rinchen Zangpo has Yeshe O dying of old age (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977–80: II.92), this seems to be a later elaboration that ties Yeshe O to the invitation of Atisha, in which in fact he probably had no involvement.
30. Decleer (1997: 159). According to some historical accounts, several previous attempts had been made to bring Atisha to Tibet.
31. This account is from the *Dromton Itinerary* translated in Decleer (1997).
32. The story appears in the eleventh-century biography of Rinchen Zangpo, though, as the translators suggest, the fact that it glorifies Atisha at the expense of the subject of the biography (who is otherwise glorified throughout) suggests that it is a somewhat later addition.

CHAPTER 4

1. For the Eight Verses and many other mind-training texts, as well as a concise introduction to the tradition, see Tubten Jinpa (2006).
2. See van der Kuip (2005).
3. This story appears in Patrul Rinpoche (1998: 127).
4. This quotation appears in a work by Sangye Gonpa (1179–1250), translated in Tubten Jinpa (2006: 365).
5. The story appears in many histories. See, for example, Dudjom (1991: I.612). The adept in question is Nub Sangye Yeshe, who was perhaps the most important scholar of the dark age, writing several commentaries and an important treatise, *The Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*, which divides Buddhist practices into four stages: (i) gradual, meaning the scholastic Buddhism of India; (ii) sudden, meaning the Chan Buddhism of China; (iii) Mahayoga; and (iv) Atiyoga. See Dalton and van Schaik (2003).
6. The stories of Zur the Elder and the Younger are from the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1996: 110–21). Though several centuries later, and no doubt much elaborated, these biographies reveal the concerns of the Zurs, their ritual specialisations, and the tensions between different religious groups in the eleventh century. Much the same account is given in Dudjom (1991: I.617–45).
7. The hail prevention tax is mentioned in the biography of Milarepa. It was observed in the early twentieth century by Ekai Kawaguchi (1909: 272–75), and in the early twenty-first century by Sun Shuyun (2009). For a discussion of this ritual, see Klein and Sangpo (1997: 538–47).
8. Translation by the author. For a discussion of the text, as well as a different translation, see Karmay 1988: 41–59.
9. The details of Marpa's story here are mainly based on the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1996: 399ff). Some aspects of Marpa's life were disputed: most significantly, some contemporaries argued that he had never met Naropa. See Davidson 2005: 141–48.
10. The name of this text is *The Questions and Answers of Vajrasattva*. For a complete translation, see Takahashi (2010).

11. For Marpa's song, see Jampa Thaye (1990: 87–90). The original texts of this song and others are in *The Treasury of Oral Instruction* VII.63–66.
12. On the story of the death of Marpa's son through black magic, see Decler (1992).
13. *The Life and Songs of Milarepa*: I.13a. See also the translation in Tsangnyon Heruka (2010: 21).
14. This account of the tower building comes from the famous Milarepa biography of Tsangnyon Heruka (see Lhalungpa 1977). See also the discussion of this story in the context of local hegemonies in eleventh-century Tibet in Wylie (1964).
15. From 'The Song of a Yogin's Joy' (*The Life and Songs of Milarepa*: II.33b–34a). See also Chang (1989: II.74).
16. Modern scholarship casts doubt on any direct attribution of the songs as we have them to the historical figure of Milarepa, as they were not written down until centuries after his death in 1123. We can at least say that the songs represent an oral tradition that goes back to Milarepa himself.
17. Marpa's lineage is known as the Dakpo Kagyu, and is the source of all the Kagyu subsects except one, the Shangpa Kagyu (see Kapstein 1980).
18. On the Tanguts, see Dunnell (1996).
19. On the Mongols in Tibet, see Petech (1990).
20. On the description of Drigung, see Gardner (2006: 232). On the rise and fall of the Drigung school, see Petech (1978). On the Tsalpa, see Sørensen and Hazod (2007).
21. These negotiations are related in detail in Everding (2002). As he points out, the Western Tibetan territory in question was not the whole of Western Tibet (or Ngari) but the kingdom of Mangyul Gungtang.
22. Because he spent so little time at the court of Kubilai, Pagpa may have had less influence on Mongol policy in Tibet than the Tibetan historical tradition credits him with. Petech argues that his main influence was in giving Tibetan Buddhism a central role at the Mongol court. He writes: 'In conclusion, the glowing portrait of 'Pags-pa as a great religious leader and as a powerful counsellor of Qubilai in Buddhist matters, so dear to the Tibetan tradition, must be toned down somewhat' (Petech 1990: 140).
23. The story of the ears, and the death of the Drigung Gonpa, are from the *History of the Mahakala Teachings* by Ame Zhap. This episode is translated in Everding (2002: 119–20). While the details are open to dispute, the Drigung rebellion and the severe crackdown by Kubilai's troops, including the destruction of Drigung monastery and the killing of the Gonpa, are not.
24. As Petech points out, the Tibetans had three main obligations to the Mongols: to provide tribute, militia and labour services (Petech 1990: 49).
25. On the Mongol understanding of their own empire, and how it differs from the Chinese presentation of the Yuan dynasty, see Hodong Kim (2009). On the ethnic divisions under Mongol rule, see Grenet (1982: 368–69).
26. See Grenet (1982: 384).
27. On the persistent influence of Mongol administrative structures in Tibet, see van der Kuijp 1991. For a detailed survey of the Mongol postal service in Tibet, see Petech (1990: 61–68). Note, however, that there was a transport network supported by corvée labour as early as the seventh century under the Tibetan empire (see Dotson 2009: 55–56).
28. This point is made by Petech (1990: 142). It should be pointed out that it applies mainly to Central Tibet. Rule of the regions of Kham and Amdo was always much more locally based in practice, if not in theory.

CHAPTER 5

1. On the Mongol donations to Sakya, with special regard to books, see Schaeffer and van der Kuijp (2009: 20–32).

2. The main source for the events in this section is the autobiography of Jangchub Gyaltsen. Shakabpa (1967: chapter 5) and Petech (1990: chapter 5) draw mainly on this source, along with some other early sources. The sources are also discussed in van der Kuijp (1991).
3. The split resulted in four noble houses (*labrang*) – Zhitog, Lhakang, Richengang and Ducho – each of which had its own abbot. The effect was a weakening of the unity of the Sakya power base, and more and more infighting within Sakya (see Petech 1990: 71–82). Note that the House of Ducho is the source of the Khon heads of the Sakya school in the present day; it later split into the two ‘palaces’ (*podrang*) of Drolma and Puntsog, which have alternated in providing the heads of Sakya.
4. Leonard van der Kuijp (1991) questions how much Jangchub Gyaltsen really changed the Mongol infrastructure. Matthew Kapstein (2006: 118) has pointed out that the term *dzong* continues to be used with the meaning of ‘county’, roughly equivalent to the Chinese *xian*.
5. Though it is often said that the Karmapas were the first tulku lineage, this is not the case, as shown by Leonard van der Kuijp in his article in Brauen (2005).
6. See Petech (1990: 87) and Karma Thinley (1980: 57–58).
7. See McCleary and van der Kuijp (2007).
8. On Sino-Tibetan relations during the Ming, see Chan (1988: 261–64) and Rossabi (1998: 241–45). Chan argues that the provision of lamas from various schools with imperial titles was a deliberate strategy on the part of Yong Le to keep Tibet divided; Rossabi disagrees. Whether Chan is right or not, it seems that the granting of these titles had only minor political capital in Tibet itself, where political power was held by those with the military advantage, as was ever the case.
9. Several chapters in Cabezon and Jackson (1996) discuss the formation of the canons and the philosophical literature of this period.
10. The origin of the four medical tantras is the subject of much disagreement. Tibetans debated whether they should be considered translations from Sanskrit (as tantras ought to be) or Tibetan compositions. In any case, most Tibetans agreed that they appeared in Tibet during the imperial period, when they were hidden and rediscovered as *terma* by Drapa Ngonshe (1012–90), and passed down to Yutok Yonten Gonpo (1138–1213), who wrote commentaries on them. On the other hand, modern scholars suggest that the tantras may have been compiled by Yutok Yonten Gonpo himself. See Meyer 1981 and the studies cited therein. For a translation of a classic later work on Tibetan medicine, see Sangye Gyatso (2009).
11. The account here is based on various biographies of Longchenpa. The earliest such is the short biography by Longchenpa’s student Chodrag Zangpo (1300–75, or ten years later). English translations of later biographies drawn from this and other early materials can be found in Thondup (1996) and Dudjom (1991: I.575–96). A translation of the visionary experiences that occurred when Longchenpa and his followers practised the *Seminal Heart of the Dakinis* (from a firsthand account in that collection) can be found in Germano and Gyatso (2000).
12. *The Thirty Letters* in *Minor Writings*: I.211–12.
13. *An Offering of Realization to the Sublime Guru Kumarāḍza* in *Minor Writings*: II.352–57.
14. The practice of revealing *terma* developed gradually. The earlier *terma* were not specifically connected with Padmasambhava, and one of the most popular, the *Mani Kambum*, was thought to go back much earlier, to the reign of Songtsen Gampo. On this, see chapter 6 of Davidson (2005). The central role of Padmasambhava seems to date from the twelfth century, when the tertön Nyangral Nyima Ozer revealed the popular biography of Padmasambhava known as the *Zanglingma*. The tradition distinguishes between ‘earth treasures’ (*sater*) recovered from the landscape, ‘mind treasures’ (*gongter*) recovered from the enlightened state of mind, and ‘pure visions’ (*dagnang*) which are visionary compositions, rather than recoveries of previously taught texts. For

- a clear exposition of the process of terma revelation in its full development, see Thondup (1986).
15. Quoted (unasccribed) in Dudjom (1991: I.935).
16. Translation from Dorje (2005: 235).
17. A good summary of Bon can be found in Kvaerne 1995. On the early Bon tertön Shenchen Luga, see Martin 2001, which also deals with Buddhist-Bon polemics, and has an extensive bibliography of works on Bon in English and Tibetan. Notable Tibetan scholars of Bon who have written in English are Samten Karmay (see the various articles collected in Karmay 1998) and Namkhai Norbu (the most substantial work in English being Namkhai Norbu 1995).
18. See the edited translation of *The Brilliance* in Snellgrove 1967. Like most things Bonpo, the account of the life of Shenrab and the system of nine ways (*theg pa* – more literally ‘vehicles’) found here is not universally accepted. See Martin (2001: 217–19).
19. Tsongkhapa is also known by the name he received when first taking the novice monk’s vows at the age of seven: Losang Drakpa.
20. The note, and what parts Tsongkhapa remembered, are mentioned in the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1996: 1073–74).
21. See Dreyfus (2003: 137–42) on the tradition of the debate round in this period, and the early career – parallel to Tsongkhapa’s – of another brilliant young scholar from this period, Bodongpa (1376–1451).
22. This is as prescribed in the Vinaya. This detail is from the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1996: 1077).
23. In terms of its tradition of textual study, the Gelug is generally agreed to derive from the Sakya school. For example, this was stated by the fourteenth Dalai Lama in a speech in Dharamsala in 2000 (see www.dalailama.com/page153.htm): ‘When it comes to detailed study of the great texts, it is the Sakya and Gelug systems which are the most developed. Of course, it would be correct to say that the Gelug tradition is in reality derived from the Sakya.’
24. This is only a part of the poem, which is translated in full in Cabezon (1992: 389–90). The translation here is my own, based on the biography *Captivating the Mind of the Scholar*: f. 9b (my translation, but see also Cabezon 1992: 521). On Khedrup’s role in the later Gelug traditions, see Ary (2009).
25. Khedrup wrote about these visions in his biography of Tsongkhapa, *The Wondrous Miracles of Tsongkhapa*.
26. There is no space here to discuss a fundamental distinction in the Indian Madhyamaka tradition as perceived by the Tibetans: the approaches of Svatantrika and Prasangika. There is a disagreement in the tradition about what distinguishes these two. See Seyfort Ruegg (1981) and McClintock and Dreyfus (2005).
27. Tsongkhapa interpreted Nagarjuna by adding certain qualifications: one cannot say that anything exists (on the ultimate level), nor that anything does not exist (on the conventional level). There are many discussions of the tradition of Buddhist logic that informed Tsongkhapa’s interpretation: see, for example, Dreyfus (1997) and Tillemans (1999).
28. There was another interpretation of Madhyamaka that came under criticism from Tsongkhapa and his followers as well as the Sakya scholars; this was the ‘empty of other’ philosophy of Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292–1361), another breakaway from the Sakya scholastic tradition. To put it simplistically, Dolpopa argued that the conventional level was empty, but that the ultimate was not. That is to say, the ultimate is ‘empty of other’ (conventional entities) but not of itself. This brought Madhyamaka into a closer relationship with another strand of Buddhist philosophy, the discourses on the ‘buddha nature’ (*tathagatagarbha*), as taught in works such as the *Uttaratantra Shastra*. See Stearns (1999).
29. A good introduction to Nagarjuna is Jay Garfield’s translation of the *Root Verses on the Middle Way* (Nagarjuna 1996). Even more important for the Tibetan Madhyamaka

- tradition is Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, translated in Chandrakirti (2002). Many of Tsongkhapa's major works are now available in translation; a classic overview of the Gelug philosophical tradition is Hopkins (1983). On Khedrup and his work, see Cabezon (1992). On the criticism of Tsongkhapa by the Sakya scholar Goramapa Sonam Senge, see Cabezon and Dargyay (2007), and for a critique by a later Nyingma scholar, see Pettit (1999).
30. See Havnevik (1989).
 31. The relatively small percentage of monks actively studying has been discussed by Western observers including Georges Dreyfus (2003) and Goldstein and Tsarong (1985). The fourteenth Dalai Lama has also said as much about Gelug monasteries in Central Tibet: 'According to the Loseling ex-abbot Pema Gyaltsen, there were some five thousand [monks] at Loseling alone. However, he would go on to say that of those only about a thousand were studying. So what about the other four thousand? Probably they just wandered about, wasting time, not studying. This was also the period when Gen Pema Gyaltsen (as abbot) had tightened things up and education was going well. However, even by his own estimates, there were no more than a thousand monks seriously engaged in studying' (see www.dalailama.com/page153.htm). See Goldstein, Siebenschuh and Tsering (1997: 27–29) for a personal account of being a drombo in a Tibetan monastery.
 32. The dob-dobs have been studied by Melvyn Goldstein (1964). See also chapter 46 in Kawaguchi (1909). Examples of violent clashes between monks of opposing schools will be seen in the following pages. Accounts of such clashes in the early twentieth century can be read in the reminiscences of Tibetan lamas including Trungpa (1966), Jackson (2003) and Tulku Urgyen (2005). The fourteenth Dalai Lama has also acknowledged that 'often during Tibet's history, monks in monasteries were fighting' (Laird 2006: 287).
 33. The life of monks in Sera monastery at the beginning of the twentieth century is described in Kawaguchi (1909). On the monks' business interests, and the poverty of the scholars, see chapter 50 of that work. Kawaguchi's account should be treated with some caution: his belief that Tibetans were only 'half-civilised' engendered an overly negative portrayal of many aspects of Tibetan life.
 34. Several accounts of such communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be found in Tulku Urgyen (2005); for an account of a nunnery specialising in meditation retreats, see pp. 159–62.
 35. There are various estimates of this figure. See McCleary and van der Kuijp (1997: 30).
 36. On the Encampment style of painting, see Jackson (1996).
 37. See Dhongthog (1977: 122b).

CHAPTER 6

1. One of the main sources for this chapter is the collection of essays in Brauen (2005). On the chronology, see Petech (1959). The present section draws on the essay from the above collection by Kollmar-Paulenz (2005), which is mainly based on a biography of the third Dalai Lama written by the fifth Dalai Lama.
2. The first and second figures in Sonam Gyatso's line of rebirths, who posthumously became known as the first and second Dalai Lamas, were Gendun Drupa (a student of Tsongkhapa) and Gendun Gyatso.
3. Why Altan Khan chose Sonam Gyatso is not known. One scholar has suggested that the Karmapa and his school were too closely associated with the Ming emperors (Kapstein 2006: 133). However, it was not an exclusive relationship, and we know that Altan Khan had a similar patron–priest relationship with the Kagyu abbot of Taglung monastery (van der Kuijp 2005: 8).
4. During this time he established the monastery of Litang.

5. The treasurer was Palden Gyatso. The other boy was Konchog Rinchen, who instead became the twenty-fourth abbot of Drigung monastery.
6. The dispute over the identity of the Fourth Dalai Lama is glossed over in most sources, but has been made explicit by Leonard van der Kuijp (2005: 8) and Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz (2005: 60).
7. Some biographies of the fourth Shamar lama state that he was king of Tibet for eleven years. This seems doubtful, and is probably a pious exaggeration of his political role as lama and advisor to the king of Tsang.
8. On the rise of the Dalai Lamas and the cultural life of Lhasa in the seventeenth century, see the articles collected in Pommaret (2003).
9. However, Shakabpa gives an example of anti-Gelug sectarianism in Tsang, where a monastery was built overlooking the Gelug monastery of Tashilhunpo and was popularly known as Tashi Zilnon: 'Overwhelming Tashilhunpo'.
10. This was Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen, the first to bear the title of Panchen Lama. However, since the title of Panchen Lama was later applied retrospectively to three previous Gelug lamas, the first Panchen Lama became the fourth in a line of reincarnate lamas. Unlike the Dalai Lamas, the Panchen Lamas are referred to using both ways of counting.
11. From the autobiography of the fifth Dalai Lama, *The Beautiful Robes of Kula*: 56.
12. *Ibid.* A slightly different translation is in Karmay (1998: 508).
13. Pabongka, the 'big rock' hermitage, is said to date from the imperial period. It was a Kadam monastery in the eleventh century, which became Sakya in the thirteenth century, and then Gelug in the fifteenth century. The abbots of Pabongka became increasingly influential. The twentieth-century abbot Dechen Nyingpo was, as we shall see, quite the opposite of Paljor Lhundrup in his emphasis on Gelug purity and his strong critiques of Nyingma practices.
14. In Tibet, the eastern Mongols were known as the Hor, and the western Mongols as the Sog (Ahmad 1970: 110).
15. It should be noted that the Dalai Lama had met other Mongol leaders before Gushi Khan, including Toba Taiji in 1626 and Arslan Khan in 1635 (see Ahmad 1970: 109–10, 114–15).
16. Sonam Chopel is also known as Sonam Rabten. The title of Desi was only given to Sonam Chopel after victory over the king of Tsang.
17. A study of the background of the Gelug school's rise to power by McCleary and van der Kuijp concludes: 'The success of the Gelug school was a combination of religious orthodoxy coupled with a willingness to resort to violence as a means of self-determination' (McCleary and van der Kuijp 2007: 32).
18. The ritual is recorded in the fifth Dalai Lama's own notes on his visions. See Karmay (1988: 20).
19. After some years of wandering, the tenth Karmapa was reconciled with the Dalai Lama, and was able to return to his traditional monastic seat at Tsurpu. However, he died young, at the age of forty-two. During his time in exile he recognised the seventh incarnation of the Shamar lama, Yeshe Nyingpo, in Amdo, but it was not until 1673 that the Shamar lama was allowed to return to his monastic seat in Central Tibet. See Richardson (1998: 499–515) and Ahmad (1970: 203).
20. See Shakabpa (1967: 111–12) and Smith (2004: 192–96).
21. See Smith (2001: 120).
22. This quotation is from the autobiography (see Ahmad 1970: 139–40). On the fifth Dalai Lama's presentation of his own role and that of Gushi Khan, see Maher (2010).
23. From the autobiography (see Ahmad 1970: 141–42).
24. 'Manchu' is a name coined by Hong Taiji (1592–1643) for the ruling class of the state created by his father Nurgaci. This ruling class were primarily Jurchen, a nomadic people similar to the Mongols, who had earlier ruled northern China as the Jin dynasty.

- (1115–1234). They were initially based in the region known in more recent times as Manchuria, to the north and northeast of Beijing.
25. This was Nurgaci (d. 1626). See Evelyn Rawski (1998: 251–52).
 26. The details of the fifth Dalai Lama's journey to Beijing are from Samten Karmay's paper 'The Vth Dalai Lama's State Visit to the Manchu Imperial Court in Beijing in 1653' (Wolfson College, Oxford, 25 June 2010). For an old, but still valuable study of the visit, based on the Chinese records, see Rockhill (1910: 13–18). The most detailed account, drawing from the autobiography, is in Ahmad (1970: 166–91).
 27. See Ahmad (1970: 168–72).
 28. On this seal, and the use of it to argue that the Dalai Lama was a subject of the emperor, see Karmay (1998: 518–22).
 29. From the autobiography, quoted in Ahmad (1970: 175).
 30. On the reasons for the Manchu invitation to the Dalai Lama, see the conclusion of chapter 4 of Ahmad (1970). The later request for troops, mentioned in the fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, is discussed in Shakabpa (1967: 120–21).
 31. Both quotations, from books written by the regent and the Dalai Lama well after the death of Drakpa Gyaltzen, are cited in McCune (2007: 17–18).
 32. Later Dolgyal came to be identified with a protector deity from the Sakya tradition called Dorje Shugden. By the nineteenth century, this deity was considered to be a protector of the Gelug tradition. See Dreyfus (1998), but note that several aspects of this article have been challenged.
 33. On this episode, see Schaeffer (2005). The fourteenth Dalai Lama, in a recent speech, mentioned the fact that the fifth Dalai Lama heaped privileges on his own monastery at the expense of the other major Gelug monasteries (www.dalailama.com/page.153.htm).
 34. Both the fifth Dalai Lama's own record of the teachings he received, and those of later Nyingma lamas such as Jigme Lingpa, show just how important he was to the continuing transmission of Nyingma received teachings (known as *kama*) in Central Tibet. He also played an important role in the continuing transmission of the Sakya Lamdre teachings (another of his personal practices) in Central Tibet.
 35. On Muslims in Tibet, see Siddiqui (1991) and Cabezon (1997).
 36. The life of the sixth Dalai Lama, and the story of his life after his death in 1706, is told in Aris (1988). See also Lo Bue (2005).
 37. There have been a number of translations of the poems of the sixth Dalai Lama. As with much popular Tibetan literature, there is no compelling evidence to link the poems to the Dalai Lama except the tradition of attribution itself. Some scholars have suggested that the poems may be a mixture of verses by Tsangyang Gyatso and others written about him by contemporaries or later poets. The most easily available translation is Williams (2004).
 38. On the *Secret Life*, see Aris (1988).
 39. The events of this and the following section are based mainly on the great work on Tibet in the eighteenth century, Petech (1972), which itself mainly draws on a biography of Pholhane, *The Biography of a Glorious Leader of Men*.
 40. Quotations from Desideri (1932: 149, 245). See also Sweet (2010) on Desideri's travels in Tibet.
 41. As quoted by Petech (1972: 54).
 42. The rearrangement of the boundaries between Tibet and China at this time is discussed in Petech (1972: 103–04).
 43. See Petech (1972: 106–08). Since the Nyingma monasteries in Central Tibet were explicitly exempted from persecution in the emperor's edict, the target of the edict seems to have been the Nyingma presence in Eastern Tibet. Most of the Gelug lamas at the Manchu court were from Amdo and may have been anxious about the power of the Nyingma adherents in their region. Despite the edict being rescinded persecution of Nyingma monasteries did occur over the following decades, as shown by a letter of the abbot of Kahtog monastery (see van Schaik 2004: 26).

44. His official title was *Wang*, meaning ‘prince’ for the Chinese, but ‘king’ for the Tibetans (Petech 1972: 241).

CHAPTER 7

1. On the Panchen Lama’s gifts, see Turner (1800: xii). Note that the sixth Panchen Lama is also referred to as the third Panchen Lama (see above, p. 280 n.10).
2. Bogle (2002: 215).
3. *Ibid.* (222).
4. *Ibid.* (215–16).
5. *Ibid.* (276).
6. Wang (2000: 162).
7. Turner (1800: 462). The contemporary Tibetan account, written by the second Jamyang Zhepa (1728–1791), has been translated into English in Ragnubs (2004).
8. Ludwig (1904: 16).
9. Ragnubs (2004: 197).
10. Some Tibetans believed that the third Panchen Lama died of poisoning, despatched by the Qianlong Emperor so that he could increase his influence in Tibet. This seems unlikely, first, because we have the account of Purangir, who describes a clear case of smallpox, second, because it is not clear how the death of the Panchen, an ally and friend of the Manchu court, favoured the interests of China.
11. Quoted in Markham (1876: 209) and Wang (2000: 138).
12. The fourth, sixth and eighth Shamar lamas had travelled to Nepal. The sixth Shamar had established a relationship with the ruling Malla family, and the eighth was actually born in Nepal, in the Helambu region (known as Yolmo in Tibetan). Note that Shakabpa and Teltscher mistakenly refer to the tenth Shamar as the ninth. In fact, the ninth Shamar died in childhood.
13. The Shamar lama’s oath and his religious work in Nepal are discussed in Dhungel (1999), which also contains the Tibetan inscription on the bell at Swayambu (though not a translation). Popular anti-Chinese and pro-Gurkha feeling is mentioned in Shakabpa (1967: 171).
14. The activities of Dodrupchen are mentioned in Thondup (1996: 145).
15. The Shamar tulku’s role in the Gurkha invasion is disputed by some in the Karma Kagyu school, who argue that he travelled to Nepal on a pilgrimage and then acted as a peace-maker. These also say nothing about a suicide. See Douglas and White (1976: 150–51).
16. This discussion of the Qing empire in Tibet is drawn from Gardner (2006: 152).
17. The four rivers are the Salween (Ngulchu in Tibetan), Mekong (Dachu), Yangtze (Drichu) and Yalong (Dzachu); the six mountain ranges are the Tsawagang, Markhamgang, Zelmogang, Poborgang, Mardzagang and Minyak Rabgang (Dorje 1999: 376). Many foreigners have been favourably impressed by the character of the Khampas they have met: Ekai Kawaguchi, for example, considered the Khampas he knew at Sera monastery to be superior to the Central Tibetans and Mongols (Kawaguchi 1909: 345–47). The violence of Khampa society is mentioned in memoirs by Khampas (for example, Jamgön Kongtrul 2003) and travel writing by foreigners (for example, Ford 1957).
18. There is a great deal of modern literature on the Gesar epic, including English translations of versions or portions of it. For an analysis of the oral nature of the epic, see Fitzherbert (2009).
19. Derge is traditionally known as one of the ‘five kingdoms’ of Kham: Derge, Nangchen, Chakla, Lingsang and Lhato. The larger of the many other minor states of Kham are listed by Gyurme Dorje thus: ‘the five Trehor states ruled by hereditary chieftains (ponpo), viz. Drango, Kangsar, Mazur, Trewo and Beri; the diverse grassland states of the upper Yalong and of Nyarong, Sangen, Gongjo and Khyungpo, which were also ruled by hereditary chieftains; the southern states of Batang, Litang, Markham,

- Tsawarong, Powo and Kongpo which were governed by appointed regents; and the western states of Chamdo, Drayab and Riwoche, which along with Gyarong and Mili, were governed by lama dignitaries' (Dorje 1999: 377).
20. This citation is from Tsewang Dorje Rigzin (b. 1786), whose genealogy of the Derge kings was published in Kolmas (1968). The text here is translated from the Tibetan in Kolmas (1968: 161 (f. 54b)).
 21. It is often stated that the style of Situ Panchen was a revival of the Karma Gardri, or 'Karma Kagyu Encampment Style' (*kar ma gar bris*). However, Jeff Watt has argued that this is a later classification, not necessarily relevant to the paintings of Situ Panchen's own time ('Tibetan Art: Moving beyond Iconography and Religion', presented 25 June 2010 at Wolfson College, Oxford).
 22. On the wars in Gyalrong (known as Jinchuan in Chinese), see Roger Greatrex 1994 and Dan Martin (1990).
 23. This event is discussed in Kolmas (1968: 42) and Smith (2001: 24–25). It is also discussed in *The Royal Genealogy of Derge*, though the sectarian aspect is not made explicit there, and in fact may not have been the determining factor in these events. See Kolmas (1968: 141–42 (f. 42a–b)).
 24. The name of this king was Tsewang Dorje Rigdzin (b. 1786).
 25. This cultural revival has, in modern Western studies, often been called the 'Rime movement', or even 'Rime school' – Rime (*ris med*) being a Tibetan term meaning 'without divisions' or, by association, 'nonsectarian'. In a historical narrative like this, however, it is better to talk about a cultural revival or renaissance rather than a 'Rime movement' in the nineteenth century. There is a good critique of the misuses of the term 'Rime' among Western Buddhist writers and scholars in Gardner (2006).
 26. It is interesting to note that, in his brief verse autobiography, the visit to Ngor monastery is not even mentioned. However, in later life he accepted the position of abbot at Ngor, despite not being resident there, and helped to revitalise the monastery's curriculum.
 27. On oral transmission and the term 'mere book', see van der Kuip (1983).
 28. The brief autobiographical verses are known as *The Directly Spoken*: 270.3. At the same time, Khyentse was developing another role, that of a revealer of secret treasures, or tertön. Some of the most sacred sites he visited inspired the revelation of 'earth treasures', sacred objects and scrolls hidden within the rocks themselves.
 29. For the Tibetan text, see *Autobiography of Jamgon Kongtrul* (1973: 214–15).
 30. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo was a prolific author as well, his own works filling some twenty-four volumes in the edition published in the 1970s. Another of Khyentse's students, the Ngor abbot Loter Wangpo, took on a project started by Khyentse and produced the hugely influential *Collection of All Sadhanas*, a fourteen-volume compilation of tantric meditation empowerments, mainly from the Sakya tradition.
 31. The most detailed study of the Nyarong war and its contexts is Tsomu (2006). See also Tsering (1985).
 32. See Jamgon Kongtrul (2003: 127) and Tsering (1985: 207–08).
 33. 'It was around this time that the queen of Derge and her son were taken hostage by the Nyarong chieftain, and my mind could find no peace whatsoever' (Jamgön Kongtrul 2003: 136).
 34. Curzon (1894: Dedication).
 35. Curzon (1889: 13–14).
 36. The text of these agreements can be read in Richardson (1962: Appendix).
 37. French (1994: 186); Lamb (1960: 263).
 38. On this, see Kuleshov (1996: 1–10).
 39. On the pundits, see Waller (1990) and Hopkirk (1997). The Japanese monk was Ekai Kawaguchi. His memoirs of his time in Tibet were published in English in 1909. See Kawaguchi (1909: 505–06) for his own account of the arrival of the guns in Tibet.

- Interestingly, though the Tibetans Kawaguchi spoke to seem to have told him that the guns were sent by Russia, when Kawaguchi examined one, he found the inscription 'Made in the United States of America'.
40. From a letter by Younghusband to Curzon, cited in French (1994: 155) (from MSS Eur F197/76).
 41. Official despatch of 4 November 1903, cited in French (1994: 193) (to whom I am indebted for the phrase 'yak-rustling').
 42. Candler (1905: 1).
 43. See Waddell (1897, 1917).
 44. For an overview of the governmental structure in Lhasa in the twentieth century, see Goldstein (1989: 6–24).
 45. Hilaire Belloc (1898).
 46. According to Tibetan accounts (see Shakabpa 1967: 211–13 and French 1994: 220–22), the British tricked the Tibetans into disarming before opening fire on them. Many of the accounts in English claim that the Tibetan general started the firing, but the earliest versions of the battle do not mention this, and it seems to be a later rationalisation for the commencement of firing on the British side (see French 1994: 222–23 and Allen 2004: 112–17).
 47. Candler (1905: 109).
 48. On the reasons for the Dalai Lama's departure from Lhasa, see the *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. I, f. 386b.4ff.
 49. *Ibid.*, vol. I, f. 395a.1.
 50. Autobiography of Gyurme Sonam Topgyal Shenkawa (p. 7), quoted in French (1994: 242).
 51. On Younghusband's opinion of the Dalai Lama and belief that he should be deposed, see Younghusband (1985 [1910]: 281–82). On his mystical vision, see *ibid.*, 326. And on his opinions of the evils of Lamaism, see *ibid.*, 315.
 52. Valentine Chirol, private correspondence, quoted in French 1994: 257. For the text of the treaty, see Richardson (1962: Appendix).

CHAPTER 8

1. Kawaguchi (1909 [1995]: 319).
2. On this affair, see the *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. I, ff. 322a–323b (translation pp. 75–77); also Kawaguchi (1909: 374–82); Bell (1946: 53–58). Kawaguchi's informant held that the regent and the other main culprits were innocent, and that the charges were a political manoeuvre.
3. The problems with the Jetsun Dampa are described in the *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. I, f. 419b. The problems with the ambans are described in Kuleshov (1996: 81–82).
4. Bell (1946: 68).
5. Van Walt (1985).
6. For an account of Zhao's campaign, see Lamb (1966: I.181–95) (drawing on British Foreign Office reports) and Sperling (1976) (drawing on Chinese official documents). See also Coleman (2002) and Younghusband (1985 [1910]: 367–76).
7. Sperling (1976: 78).
8. Lamb (1966: I.188–90).
9. On the Anglo-Russian agreement, see Lamb (1966: 71–144).
10. Bell (1946: 77).
11. *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. II, ff. 52–60. Western observers in Beijing thought that they were witnessing the end of the Dalai Lama's temporal powers. See Bell (1946: 75, 77) and Mayer and Brysac (1999: 421).
12. Several modern accounts state that the Chinese army that occupied Lhasa was led by Zhao Erfeng, but this is wrong; it was led by a Sichuan official called Zhongying. Zhao's

- army did reach Central Tibet, within six days' march of Lhasa, but turned back to Kham at that point. See Sperling (1976: 84). See also Lamb (1966: vol. I, chapter 13).
13. The *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama* mentions the motivation of trying to get back to China. A letter from the Tsongdu detailing the losses suffered by Tibetans as the Chinese pursuers passed through their territory can be found at L/PS/10/147(3802). The 110 instances of loss mostly relate to horses and ponies, but also some more minor items, such as no. 18: 'From Shingtsang: 1 copper vessel and 1 female undergarment.'
 14. Luff's account is given in Bell (1946: 85–87).
 15. *Ibid.*, 91.
 16. Goldstein (1989: 52–53).
 17. Detailed account is in Bell's report of May 1910: L/PS/10/147(851).
 18. Letter to the Foreign Office, sent 22 February 1910; draft in L/PS/10/147(2968).
 19. *Further Papers Relating to Tibet* [Cd 5240], 1910. No. 354: 'From the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, dated 4th May 1910.'
 20. Bell (1946: 100–01).
 21. The full letter is in Shakabpa (1967: 234–37).
 22. *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. II, f. 91ff (translation II.26–28).
 23. Bell (1946: 126).
 24. *Ibid.*, 127 (he states that the pro-Chinese position in Drepung was due to the large number of monks there from the Sino-Tibetan borderlands).
 25. On the details of this war from the Tibetan perspective, see Shakabpa (1967: 238–42).
 26. Translations from Shakabpa (1967: 246–48). Note that the Dalai Lama was not saying that the patron–priest relationship had faded like a rainbow; he was referring to the Chinese efforts at colonising Tibet, and was quite happy for the patron–priest ideal to continue – though after the last emperor was deposed, this had become distinctly unlikely.
 27. On the impact of Nationalism on Tibet and China at this time, see chapter 2 of Tuttle (2005).
 28. The Dalai Lama's letters, along with Gould's translations and valuations of the presents, are found in L/PS/11/64(2461).
 29. On the Rugby boys, see Lamb (1966, vol. II, Appendix XI). Also Gould's own account in Gould (1957: 27–32).
 30. Kuleshov (1996: 117).
 31. See Tuttle (2005: 59–61) and Clubb (1964: 43). Apparently most of the speech was written in Nanjing (where Sun-yat Sen was in power) and the part on uniting the five races was added in Beijing (where Yuan Shikai was in power). See Fenby (2009: 126). Also Eto and Shiffrin (1994: 51).
 32. See the translation of the two messages from the president in L/PS/10/147(4964), dated 12 December 1912. On the ambassador's objections to the mission, and other Chinese expansionist activities in Tibet at this time, see L/PS/10/147(4561).
 33. Letter to the foreign secretary, 27 April 1912, containing a translation of the presidential order of 21 April 1912, in L/PS/10/265.
 34. The British intercepted the president's orders and protested. The president assured the British that the telegram had been misunderstood, but the British were not convinced. See telegrams of March to August 1912 in L/PS/10/265.
 35. Telegram from the viceroy dated 23 March 1912: L/PS/10/265(1116). In the same telegram he also wrote: 'In any case, the geographical position of Tibet renders it absolutely necessary country should be kept in state of political isolation.' In the same file are many communications regarding Chinese incursions into Eastern Tibet, and British protests against these which were taken directly to the Chinese president.
 36. See, for example, the letters in L/PS/11(3906).
 37. See the full text of the Simla Agreement in Richardson (1962: Appendix C).
 38. An official map showing the borders of Inner and Outer Tibet is to be found in L/PS/10/883(2212).

39. Nietzsche (1969: 89).
40. The extent to which Charles Bell's advice informed the Dalai Lama's decisions and the reform of the Tibetan administration is stated in the *Biography*, vol. II, f. 305a.
41. This affair was described by Bell in telegrams to India contained in L/PS/10/883, and more briefly in Bell (1946: 307–09). A more detailed account, based on interviews, is in Goldstein (1989: 104–10).
42. Ford (1957: 15). He was, it should be said, only comparing Lhasa to the less well-connected Eastern Tibetan town of Chamdo, where he was posted.
43. Translations of the Panchen Lama's explanation, in a letter to the king of Nepal, and the Dalai Lama's proclamation are found in L/PS/12/4174. On the Panchen Lama's movements after leaving Tashilhunpo, see Jagou (1996).
44. The conflict between the thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama is described in detail in Mehra (1976), and in Goldstein (1989: 110–20, 289–99). There were many lamas from Eastern Tibet who worked closely with the Chinese (see next section); as well as one prominent lama from Lhasa, mentioned in Charles Bell's confidential letter to the foreign secretary in India, dated 20 June 1921, in L/PS/10/883(3484).
45. *Biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama*, vol. II, f. 209a.2.
46. Many of Pabongka's sermons and brief teachings in Kham can be found in 'Questions and Answers on Sutra and Mantra' in the *Collected Works*, vol. 6. For example, ff. 11b–12a has his assurance that there is no sin in replacing Nyingma practices with Gelug ones. Beginning on f. 30a there is a discussion of the fact that only the Gelug school presents the correct philosophical view, and that that of other schools is erroneous. See Dhongthog (2000) for a polemical attack on Pabongka for his activities in Kham. In this work Pabongka's sectarian activities are associated with his propagation of the deity Dorje Shugden, which is still highly controversial (see Dreyfus 1997).
47. On Liu Wenhui's campaigns in Kham, see Richardson (1962: 134–36) and Goldstein (1989: 221–23).
48. The three letters are found in the collection entitled 'Questions and Answers on Sutra and Mantra', *Collected Works*, vol. 6, ff. 30b–34b. The section quoted here is on f. 34a–34b.
49. Bell (1946: 369–70).
50. Translated from ff. 6 and 7 of the last testament. Tibetan pages reproduced in Brauen (2005: fig. 104). The complete text is translated in Bell (1946: chapter 57). See also Mullin (1978). The translation here is my own and differs in some respects.
51. Lungshar's reform movement, and the arrest and punishment of its members, is discussed in detail (mainly based on interviews) in Goldstein (1989: 190–212).

CHAPTER 9

1. An intimate view of Ngapo Ngawang Jigme emerges from the memoirs of his sister-in-law, Rinchen Dolma Taring (1986). Apparently her servants preferred him to another suitor because 'a shy man suits servants' (p. 135). She also records that Ngapo and his wife had twelve children. A less positive, though surprisingly sympathetic, view is given by Robert Ford in his memoir (1957).
2. India Office Record L/PS/12/4232(98), telegram dated 6 September 1949.
3. Goldstein (2007: 30). From Cold War History Archive: 01/22/1950, 'Minutes of Conversation between I.V. Stalin and Mao Zedung, Moscow'. Online version at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>.
4. Troop numbers from Goldstein (1989: 638–39). A vivid account of the poor state of the Tibetan army in Chamdo at this time is given in Ford (1957). According to the Dalai Lama (1997 [1962]: 59), the total number of soldiers in the Tibetan army was 8,500.

5. The Reting affair and the uprising at Sera are discussed in detail in chapter 14 of Goldstein (1989). See also chapters 15 and 16 on the Tibetan government's relationship with the British government and the Chinese Guomindang during this period.
6. Hugh Richardson had come to Tibet with the British Mission led by Basil Gould in 1936, and stayed on, becoming the first, and last, British representative in Lhasa in the years 1936–40 and 1946–50. As well as Harrer's famous book (1953), see Aufschnaiter's *Eight Years in Tibet*, published over fifty years later, in 2004. Other foreigners were briefly in or near Tibet at this time. An American intelligence agent called Frank Bessac was captured by Tibetans in Amdo on 29 April 1950 and brought to Lhasa on 11 June, where he stayed for six weeks (see Bessac 2006). An English missionary, Geoffrey Bull, who had been trying to enter Tibet without success for some time, was in southern Kham and was captured by the PLA and imprisoned along with Fox (see Bull 1955). Finally, the Dalai Lama (1997 [1962]: 59) also mentions a 'White Russian' refugee in Lhasa at this time.
7. This action was instigated by Ngapo. A full list of over one hundred expelled people is given in L/PS/4232(87), dated 11 August 1949. The Tibetans asked the government of India for help in expelling the Chinese from Tibet in July 1949. The Chinese ambassador in India was surprised by the action, and expressed his doubts that there were any Communists among the Chinese in Tibet, speaking archly of 'fishing for red herring on a high plateau' (L/PS/4232[64], dated 28 July 1949).
8. Goldstein (2007: 20–22).
9. Goldstein (1989: 692); Shakya (2000: 44).
10. See Ford (1957). The book was published in the USA under the title *Wind between the Worlds*.
11. See Thubten Jigme Norbu (1986 [1960]), his own reminiscences of this time, as told to Heinrich Harrer.
12. Shakya (2000: 67).
13. The full text of the Seventeen-Point Agreement has been published in various places, including Richardson (1962), Goldstein (1989 and 2007). The two supplements were only published in March 2009, in a Chinese article in the state news agency *Xinhua*. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/17/content_11018917_2.htm (accessed 4 December 2009).
14. Since all sides agreed to the making of these seals, which serve the same function as signatures in Western documents, the claim by some that they were forged is misleading. As they represented the signatures of the delegates, they would still require the ratification of the Tibetan government, which was given shortly afterwards.
15. See Dalai Lama (1997 [1962]: 69).
16. Goldstein (1989: 812).
17. The Dalai Lama mentioned this interview to Punwang later in Beijing. See Goldstein, Sherab and Siebenschuh (2004: 193).
18. Goldstein (1989: 812).
19. Spence (1999: 121); Gladney (1996: 88).
20. On the Marxist model, and its application in the Soviet Union and China, see Connor (1984). Connor points out that the Chinese Communists chose not to follow Lenin's argument that minorities should be allowed rights of succession (pp. 87–92). For more on the Chinese Communist Party's line on minorities, see Minglang Zhou (2003: 45–47).
21. On Ngapo's wig, see Goldstein, Sherab and Siebenschuh (2004: 160); on the Dalai Lama's meeting with Punwang, see Dalai Lama (1998 [1990]: 72).
22. See Goldstein, Sherab and Siebenschuh (2004: 166–72).
23. On the close relationship between the Dalai Lama and Ngapo at this time, see Goldstein (2007: 195) (quoted from an interview with the Dalai Lama in 1993).
24. On the shift in the balance of trade relations, see Shakya (2000: 115).

25. On the new school and other Chinese institutions in Lhasa, see Khétsun (2008: 13–14) (the quoted saying is from p. 13).
26. Goldstein (2007: 454–63); Shakya (2000: 116–17).
27. On Mao's reference to the 'Dalai clique' and the role of the Panchen Lama, see Mao Zedong, 'On the Policies for our Work in Tibet', 6 April 1952 (Maoist Documentation Project: <http://www.marxists.org>).
28. Punwang's account of this meeting is in Goldstein, Sherab and Siebenschuh (2004: 189–91). Mao's methods for putting people at their ease and winning them over are described in Li (1994: chapters 6–8).
29. On the Dalai Lama's later description of himself as 'half-Marxist, half-Buddhist', see Goldstein (2007: 504–05). On his request to join the Communist Party, see Goldstein, Sherab and Siebenschuh (2004: 195).
30. Positive feelings towards Mao are recorded in Dalai Lama (1997 [1962]: 88); and much later in the interviews in Laird (2006: 323–24). During his first visit to Europe in 1973, the Dalai Lama publicly praised Mao ('Dalai Lama Makes First UK Visit', BBC Archive, 20 October 1973). The Dalai Lama expressed less positive feelings about the other Communist leaders, such as Zhou Enlai, whom he found too smooth and charming.
31. Mao's last words to the Dalai Lama are mentioned in the latter's two memoirs and in various interviews. On the Dalai Lama's return journey, see Goldstein (2007: 523–30). On the content of the talks given by the Karmapa and the head of the Sakya school, see chapter 9 of Trungpa (1987 [1966]).
32. Hsu (1964: 24–25).
33. Sources from *ibid.*, 56–57 and Ling Nai-min (1964: 179–83). On the life of Geshe Sherab Gyatso, see Stoddard (1988) and Tuttle (2005). On pro-Communist literature by Sherab Gyatso and other Tibetans in their period, see Hartley (2008). Sherab Gyatso was himself labelled a counter-revolutionary and killed in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution, but the Buddhist Association of China still exists.
34. Ling (1964: 184–206).
35. The different approach applied in Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Qinghai and other Chinese provinces is implicit in the discussions in 1956, and explicit in the 1957 'Outline of Propaganda for CCP Tibet Work Committee Concerning the Policy of Not Implementing Democratic Reforms in Tibet within Six Years', where it is stated that 'The reason for the continuation until the fulfilment of the democratic reform in the Tibetan nationality areas in Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces should be solemnly pointed out. The continuation of democratic reform in those areas is a good thing determined by the local Tibetan people and upper-strata personages' (Ling 1964: 212). On Central Tibetan prejudice against Khampas, see Shakya (2000: 142).
36. Dalai Lama (1981 [1990]: 127).
37. Shakya (2000: 155). This meeting was reported in a British Foreign Office document, FO 371-127639. This record of Ngapo's critical comments to Zhou belies the simplistic idea that he was a traitor or collaborator.
38. Hsu (1964: 56–57).
39. On Khenpo Khangshar, see Trungpa (1987 [1966]: 120–25) and Jackson (2003: 210–13).
40. See Gonpo Tashi Andrugtsang (1973). The extensive secondary literature on the Khampa rebels and later CIA involvement is given in McGranahan (2006: 104–05, n. 4).
41. Dalai Lama (1998: 112–13).
42. The figure of 35 million deaths was arrived at by Yang Jisheng after two decades of research in China's local archives. His account of the Great Leap Forward, *Tombstone 墓碑*, was published in Hong Kong in 2008.
43. Trungpa (1987: 143–44).
44. This and the previous paragraph are based on Khétsun (2008: 24–29).

45. Shakya (2000: 194). Regarding the entertainment at the Chinese camp, Shakya cites Sakya and Emery (1990: 271–73). Note, however, that here Jamyang Sakya is describing a similar event that happened earlier, and not the crucial one on 10 March.
46. Ling (1964: 371).

CHAPTER 10

1. Shakya (2000: 230).
2. Administration of Justice – Documents, 5 June 1959. Available at <http://www.icj.org>. Shakya (2000: 223) points out that this document ‘was unashamedly pro-Tibetan and accepted the Tibetans’ account without question’.
3. For statistics on the Tibetan diaspora, see chapter 10 of Grunfeld (1996). See also Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1981.
4. On the structure of the Dalai Lama’s government in exile, see Stephanie Roemer (2008). On the refugee camps, schools and other exile institutions, see Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1981).
5. On the rebel camp, see McGranahan (2006). On the tensions between Gyalo Thondup and the Kashag, and the disintegration and reformulation of the government in exile, see Roemer (2008: 89–92). See also chapter 19 of Craig (1997).
6. On the background to the Sino-Indian War, see Lamb 1964. The Chinese put their side of the dispute in a 1962 publication, *The Sino-India Boundary Question* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press), which also includes a long letter to international governments by Zhou Enlai (15 November 1962) which makes it clear that the Chinese leadership considered the status of Tibet to be the central issue in the conflict. The Special Frontier Force (SFF), also known as ‘Establishment 22’, currently comprises some 10,000 soldiers, around 6,000 of whom are Tibetans. The SFF fought in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 and in the 1999 Kargil conflict in Kashmir. Until the late eighties, membership in the SFF was compulsory for Tibetan students graduating from Tibetan Children’s Village (US Embassy cable: New Delhi 0000290, 11/02/2010).
7. On the role of bondservants during the Tibetan empire, see Dotson (2009: 67–69). Anna Louise Strong (1960: chapter 8) gives a firsthand account of a struggle session against the former Kashag minister Lhalu. Though the author was uncritical of the propaganda of the Chinese and Tibetan cadres who were her informants, there is some documentary value in this account.
8. According to one Chinese source, between 1958 and 1960 the number of functioning monasteries dropped from 2,711 to 360, while the number of monks dropped from 114,000 to 18,104 (Smith 1996: 544). By 1962, the number of monasteries had dropped to 70, and the Chinese government had agreed to allow a total of only 5,000 monks in the whole of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (Shakya 2000: 273). From these figures it appears that the suppression of monasticism in Tibet was Party policy well before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.
9. Tibet Information Network (1997: 51–52 (monasteries), 101–02 (cadres)). In the petition the Panchen Lama also wrote that 5 per cent of the population had been imprisoned after the 1959 revolt, but much later said that he had deliberately understated the figure, which was more likely to have been 10–15 per cent. See Barnett (2008a: 199, n.22).
10. See the translated excerpts from Wei Jinsheng’s 1979 article on Qingcheng at <http://www.echonyc.com/#atwei/Bast.html> (accessed January 2010).
11. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006: 118–22).
12. One of these pamphlets is reproduced in Shakya (2000: 320–21).
13. Photographs of the events of the Cultural Revolution including the sacking of the Jokhang taken by a PLA officer (the father of the author) were published in *Gsar brjed* (‘Cultural Revolution’) by Woeser (‘Od zer) in 2009 by the Norwegian Tibet Committee (Chinese version published in Taiwan by Locus Publishing in 2007).

14. See Mullin (1981: 9–10).
15. On Ngapo's and the Panchen Lama's efforts to restore the use of Tibetan, see Shakya (2000: 406–07).
16. Sun Shuyun (2009: 21–22).
17. Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup (2009: 19–20).
18. Regarding the number of Chinese Red Guards who travelled to Tibet, official Chinese histories state that approximately one thousand came in 1966 before November, when this activity was discouraged by a hastily drafted policy by Zhou Enlai to prevent Han students from travelling to ethnic-minority areas (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 111). This was probably mainly in an effort to spare the regional Party in Lhasa from the 'bombard the headquarters' movement, and the policy seems to have been overturned when the Cultural Revolution entered its next phase in 1967. According to a Tibetan source (Kunsang Paljor 1977), in total three thousand Red Guards came from Beijing, with a further four thousand Tibetan Red Guards coming from Xianyang province, and several hundred others from other Tibetan areas outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (Smith 1996: 542–43).
19. This is a controversial point. Some accounts state that the Gyenlog faction was predominantly Tibetan, which gives it the appearance of a Tibetan Nationalist movement. Shakya (2000: 329) states that the Namdrel faction contained the greater number of Tibetans in general; however, in Lhasa, which was the stronghold of the Gyenlog, the majority of Tibetans supported this group. It seems that some Tibetans joined the Gyenlog as a means of attacking the Chinese and contesting their dominance, but this seems to have been ethnic rather than nationalist antagonism. See Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup 2009.
20. See Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup 2009. There is some disagreement about whether the Nyemo uprising should be considered a Tibetan nationalist uprising, a reaction to the economic stresses of the introduction of communes, or a continuation of the factional fighting between Gyenlog and Namdrel. In Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup's account, all three factors were involved.
21. See McGranahan (2006).
22. Douglas and White (1976: 118–21).
23. Jackson (2003: 271–80).
24. On Geshe Wangyal in America, see Fields (1981: 290–94).
25. From the BBC archives, 20 October 1973.
26. Craig 1997: 316.
27. On the fact-finding visits, see Goldstein (1997: 62–63) and chapter 3 of Craig (1997). Quotation 'The efforts of . . .' from Dalai Lama (1988 [1990]: 254).
28. On Hu's visit, see Wang Yao (1994). Report quoted in Lawrence 2004: 247 and Goldstein (1997: 64–65).
29. On the revival of Buddhism in Drepung, see Goldstein (1998).
30. For the English article by Ngapo, see Ngapo (1981). Other veiled criticisms of Party policy by Ngapo are discussed in Barnett (2008a).
31. The reasons for the failure of this period of negotiations are still much contested. A concise discussion (though still controversial) can be found in Goldstein (1997: 67–76).
32. The Dalai Lama's speech in Strasbourg was seen by some Tibetans – including the Dalai Lama's brother Thubten Jigme Norbu and the Tibetan Youth Congress – as going too far in relinquishing Tibetan independence. See Goldstein (1997: 139, n.24).
33. The Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, given on 10 December 1989. See <http://nobelprize.org>. Note that the principles of 'equality, respect, trust and mutual benefit' reflect a much more recent source, the 1954 Sino-Indian Panchasila Treaty.
34. Hilton (1999: 193–94) suggests that there is little ground for doubting the official account of the Panchen Lama's death from a heart attack.

35. A similar cooperative venture had been tried in the case of the recognition of the seventeenth Karmapa. In this case the Party allowed the whole process to be undertaken by exile lamas. However, the search resulted in two rival candidates, one supported by the Tai Situ tulku, and the other by the Shamar tulku. The Dalai Lama gave his official confirmation only to Tai Situ's candidate, who was enthroned in the Karmapa's ancient seat in Tibet. However, Shamar's candidate was enthroned in India, resulting in a serious dispute among the exile Karma Kagyu school. Then, at New Year 2000, Tai Situ's Karmapa left his monastery in Tibet and escaped across the border. Both Karmapas now reside in India.
36. For a detailed discussion of the Third Work Forum, see Barnett (1996). The text of the report can also be found on various websites.
37. On the background to the Panchen Lama dispute, and the events at the time, see Hilton (1999); on the subsequent representations of the dispute and the enthronement of the eleventh Panchen Lama by the Chinese government, see Barnett (2008b).
38. On the train project, and its impact in Tibet, see Lustgarten (2009). On the link between development and changes in the Tibetan ecosystem, see Pomeranz (2009: 16–21). There have now been several studies of the changes in Tibetan glaciers. See, for example, Kehrwald, et al. (2008). For a summary of recent Chinese studies, see Qiu (2008). In Rome on 18 November 2009, the Dalai Lama stated his opinion that the environmental crisis was a more urgent issue for Tibet than the political solution he had been pursuing for so many years (Reuters). A leaked US Embassy cable states that in August 2009, in a meeting with the US Ambassador to India, the Dalai Lama argued that the political agenda should be sidelined for five to ten years and the focus moved to climate change in Tibet (New Delhi 001667, 10/08/09).
39. See the discussion of nationalism in China in Jenner (2001). A recent secret report from the US Embassy in Beijing (000022, 06/01/09) claims that nationalism is 'one of two main pillars of post-Mao Chinese Communist Party rule' (the other being sustained economic growth). Patrick French's popular travel memoir *Tibet Tibet* (2003) argued that foreign agitation for Tibetan independence had been counter-productive.
40. The *Three Kingdoms* was written in the fourteenth century and is attributed to Luo Guanzhong. The English is from the translation by Moss Roberts (Luo Guanzhong 1991).
41. Schell and Shambaugh (1998: 520).
42. On education among Tibetans in Tibet and in exile, see Bangsbo (2008).
43. On Jigme Puntsog's community at Larung Gar, see Germano (1998). On its suppression, see Lustgarten (2009: 152–53). On the revival of festivals and rituals, see, for example, Diemberger (2002).
44. An important early survey of writing and publication in modern Tibet is Stoddard (1994). More recently, see the papers in Venturino (2007), and Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008.
45. See Tashi Rabgey (2008).
46. This poem, in Chinese and English translation, began circulating on Chinese internet sites in early 2010. Most such verses seem to be composed in Amdo, where much of the traditionalist-modernist debate has also taken place (on which, see Hartley 2002).

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Note: Tibetan and Chinese names are listed without reversing first and last names (except in the case of certain modern figures) and any titles are placed after the name. Thus *Geshe Ben Gungyal* is indexed as *Ben Gungyal, Geshe*. Dalai and Panchen Lamas, and Karmapas, are indexed by their number rather than their personal name, thus *Dalai Lama, 14th* rather than *Tenzin Gyatso*.

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